ゼロの使い魔
13
〈聖国の世界扉（ワールド・ドア）〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

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ゼロの使い魔13

ヤマグチノボル

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ゼロの使い魔13　聖国の世界扉（ワールドドア）

才人が元の世界へと帰るための方法を探してあげたい。でも、才人に帰ってほしくない。二つの気持ちに戸惑うルイズ。一方、里心がついた才人だったが、ハルケギニアで仲良くなった人たちを見て、心が揺らいでいく。「こっちの世界にいてもいいんじゃないか」と思い始める才人。そんな折、女王アンリエッタより、ロマリアへと来てほしいと使いがくる。"虚無の担い手"であるルイズとティファニアへ伝えることがあるというのだ。それは、"虚無"に関する重要な秘密だというが――。アンリエッタの、ロマリアの意図は何か？　ガリア王ジョゼフの思惑は――？
大人気の異世界使い魔ファンタジー、急展開の第13弾！

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』『魔法薬売りのマレア　千日カゲロウ』『ストライクウィッチーズ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎**兎塚エイジ**（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ。大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
イラスト仕事歴は
「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）
「ふたりはなめこじる」（電撃hp）
「神曲奏界ポリフォニカ ぶるう」シリーズ（GA文庫）
「悪魔憑きの目覚め」（富士見ドラゴンブック）
「ゼロの使い魔」シリーズ（MF文庫J）
などです。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔 13

〈聖国の世界扉（ワールド・ドア）〉

ヤマグチノボル

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*** アンリエッタ ***
トリスティンの女王。女王であること以上に国の象徴として国民の期待を背負う。ルイズとは幼なじみの関係。
*** ルイズ ***
サイトを召喚したサイトの三主人様で、意地っ張りだがサイトに惹かれる気持ちを素直に見せることもある。伝説の系統「虚無」の使い手。
聖エイジス三十三世
(ヴェルーリア・セレフォレ)
ロマリアの若き教皇。争いが絶えないハルケギニアの現状を憂いている。
*** 平賀才人 ***
(サイト)
現代日本からハルケギニアに召喚された少年。ルイズの使い魔であり、「ガンダールヴ」としてあらゆる武器を使いこなす。
*** ティファニア ***
アルビオン王家の血を引くハーフエルフの少女。人目を避けてくらしていたが、トリスティン魔法学院へと転入してきた。伝説の系統「虚無」の使い手。
*** シエスタ ***
サイト専属のメイドで、サイトのことが好き。平民だが、サイトを通してルイズと張り合うなど、時に回復しては大胆な面をみせる。

ゼロの使い魔13
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Chapter 1: Romalia

The Holy Empire of Romalia.

One of the oldest countries in Halkeginia, often shortened to the “Holy Empire”, was a city-state located directly south of Gallia on the Ausonia peninsula.

The land of the Romalian Empire, ruled by a disciple of Founder Brimir, St. Forsythe, was only a single city-state at first. However, this esteemed “holy empire” then sought after expansion, and one-by-one annexed the other city-states around it.

During King Julio Cesar’s reign, his influence finally left the peninsula and occupied half of Gallia’s lands.

However… that king’s reign did not continue for long.

After being expelled from Gallia’s lands, the annexed regions went through a cycle of independence and re-annexation. Finally at the end of the wars, the greatest regions of the Romalian Empire had been scattered.

From then on, each region individually developed its own beliefs, especially towards that of diplomacy for Romalia. In other words, their roots became completely different. It was more similar to that of the Germanian Imperialism of Northern Halkeginia.

Inferior to the other major powers of Halkeginia, Romalia instead applied themselves as the “center of Brimir’s teachings” as their main point as an established country.

Romalia was the resting place of Founder Brimir, so it was natural for St. Forsythe to build a country to protect his grave.

The descendents utilized this historical fact as the biggest reason to turn the city

of Romalia into sacred ground. This was how the holy capital was established.

As a result, Romalia became a holy city-state where a huge temple was erected, which became the Forsythe shrine. For generations, the king was called the "Pope," and all of his clergymen and followers stood at the top.

"…Really, every time I come to this country, the architecture and themes just jump out at me."

Queen Henrietta of Tristain peeked out the window of her horse-drawn carriage, gazing at the streets of Romalia.

It was the month of Sol, the week of Freya and the day of Ösel, this world's equivalent to May 7th.

It was around the time of the huge commotion involving Tiffania's transfer to the Academy of Magic…

In this religious city of Romalia, priests throughout Halkeginia "flooded the land with holy light". These holy servants were wrapped in clothing that shimmered brightly as they walked around while devout followers exchanged warm greetings with them…

The city was filled with rich smiles as the priests guided the religious followers of Brimir down the right path, in which the Pope passed down the teachings of being a "servant of the people as well as God's servant…"

This idealistic view, while practiced mainly in this part of the Ausonia peninsula, was held in belief by a majority of the people of Halkeginia, who seldom ever left the city or village they were born in…

"These commoners are flooding in from every land. Aren't they just acting however they felt like? Instead of "idealistic views," it seemed more like an example of a city of cave dwellers."

Henrietta mumbled with a sigh.

On the streets, the followers that flowed in from Halkeginia lined up in front of a pot of soup being distributed by the Salvation knights of the Maltius brigade. These people had made their way to this city, but they had no job, nothing to do,

and barely any food and clothing.

Behind the followers were numerous stone pillars of Ionic style which led to a luxurious temple in the distance. Fancily robed priests chatted as they passed through the door into the temple.

The new followers had no choice but to sing praises of worship - thought Henrietta. The townspeople were barely surviving on a cup of soup, while the priests were dressed up lavishly and enjoying various forms of luxury…

When she was a child, she had visited this city and had not noticed this. There were rows of grand temples lined up for every religion. Shining stained glass and sculptures, crafted into the greatest of masterpieces, had completely captivated her attention back then.

A movement in front of her caught her attention. In front of her sat an uncomfortable looking Captain Agnes of the Musketeer Corps, who shrunk back in her seat.

“What is the matter, Captain?”

“Nothing… I’m not used to this appearance…”

Instead of her usual chain-mail, Agnes was clothed in a dress fit for a noblewoman. Under that appearance, combining with her fair facial features, she looked every bit like a lady from a good family.

However… her sharp warrior-like eyes were piercing through the gentle appearance she was dressed in.

Combined with the sheathed blade that adorned her side… the Captain of the Musketeer Corps had quite an irregular appearance. Henrietta smiled towards her.

“It suits you.”

“Please don’t tease me.”

With a gloomy tone, Agnes mumbled.

“I shouldn’t be the one to do this. There was no reason for me to wear these fancy clothes and come all the way to Romalia.”

“I need an attendant. You can also double as an escort. Very convenient indeed…”

“I’m only good with a blade. How can I possibly pass as an attendant?”

“As the Captain of the Imperial Guards say, only waving a sword or wand around is not a job. Depending on the time and place, even those of noble standing must lend a hand to a guest. If you won’t do the honor of this, I will be very troubled.”

Henrietta replied with a tone that suggested that her decision was final. However, Agnes just couldn’t accept the circumstance.

“What about Cardinal Mazarin? Usually, isn’t it his role as prime minister to be the attendant…?”

“Beside him, is there anyone that I can trust to be there in my absence?”

‘Well that’s true…’ mumbled Agnes as she looked uneasy and desperate to continue arguing.

“But if I don’t carry a sword or gun with me, I will feel insecure.”

“There is no way around it. It is the law of this country.”

To pass through the outer gates of the Romalian capital, even military escorts such as Agnes would have to remove her sword. While keeping it inside the luggage that was loaded onto their carriage was permissible, the religious capital did not allow the carrying of weaponry on hand. It was a regulation unique to Romalia. Even the crystal wand that Henrietta usually held onto had also been stored inside of her bag.

“But in the event of an emergency, I cannot protect your Majesty.”

Henrietta motioned to the obviously unsatisfied Agnes to look out the window. Outside, there were knights clad in white robes riding majestic unicorns. On either side of the carriage, they were keeping a close watch on the guest of honor

as they escorted the carriage.

Around their necks were sacred charms. Also, a large symbol of the Founder holding out his hand was embroidered onto the chest of the white robes in silver thread.

“The Romalian Templar Knight Squadron will protect us.”

These knights were the only ones who could carry arms in the religious capital. They were the elite of the elites.

The Romalian Templar Knights… they defined the highest standard of the loyalty among various military organizations in each of the major Halkeginian powers.

These men would truly “fight to the death” if the Pope wished them to. To a devout believer of Brimir, their white clothing was a symbol of light. To heretics, it was a symbol of terror. There is nothing more troublesome than an enemy that doesn’t fear death.

Agnes’s face slightly clouded with worry.

“I can’t imagine them going as far as risking their lives to protect a new believer such as myself.”

Henrietta was not shaken by Agnes’s words that contained a bit of self-mockery.

“God more or less turns a blind eye to the concept of discrimination.”

She calmly said something that would make the priests from Romalia faint immediately if they'd heard it.

Behind Queen Henrietta’s carriage were a line of carriages for her personal attendants, family members and members of the government. The very best musketeers and mages were assigned to guard each one of these carriages.

For this particular attendance of the ceremony, these people had to travel across the ocean by boat all the way to Romalia. An invitation letter was sent to Saito and company when they met up with Tiffania, but somehow that letter came back to Henrietta. In the end, she had barely missed them as they returned from

Albion with Tiffania.

While it would take only three days to sail through the sky of Gallia, Henrietta feared that relation with Gallia was becoming sour. Because of this, a considerable detour using a sea route was chosen instead. This resulted in a week of travel before arriving.

However… the ceremony was scheduled to occur 20 days later.

“If it’s ok with you, as an attendant I want to ask you something…”

“Go ahead.”

“Why is it that we arrived for the ceremony 20 days early?”

“The visit for the ceremony is an excuse. We will be holding secret negotiations at this time.”

“With the Pope… right?”

“Who else?”

Agnes looked down deep in contemplation.

“What is the matter, Captain?”

Henrietta asked with a worried voice, in which Agnes looked up.

“…It's nothing. I was just lost in thought. Please excuse me.”

The old part of Romalia was surrounded by castle walls. The stone paving that was built in ancient times were aligned in an orderly pattern. It was very different from the disorderly feeling of Tristania or the capital city of Gallia, Lutèce, in which the aging of their walls showed both periods of prosperity and turmoil. The clean, pearl-like stone walls here seemed to stretch on endlessly. This abnormally clean impression left a feeling of purity in the air.

“It truly is a beautiful city.”

Agnes broke the silence with her thoughts of Romalia. Without any reply, an apparently anxious Henrietta silently fiddled with the ends of her fingers.

Since it was a surprise imperial visit before the actual ceremony, there were no flags flown beside the driver of the carriages to indicate the importance of the inhabitants. Simply with the presence of the Templar knights escorting the carriage, the city's inhabitants knew that it had to be a person of high societal standing.

On top of that, the three carriages carrying the delegates were taking up the entire width of the main road.

Further down the road, six large towers rose in the distance. The tower in the middle was much larger, with the other five towers arranged in the shape of a five-pointed star around it.

This shape looked very similar to the one at Tristain's Academy of Magic. This can be expected since the construction of the academy was modeled after the motif of the Romalian holy capital.

All of the Templar knights that were escorting the carriages advanced towards the gate in unison. Along both sides of the gate, they dismounted and formed a gallant line, holding their sacred armaments up like magic wands. The sunlight made them glitter like silver decorations that magnificently adorned the cathedral's gates.

"…looks like we have arrived."

Henrietta mumbled. Agnes looked out the window briefly with a sigh.

"Is that the Romalian cathedral? It looks similar to the Academy of Magic… it could almost be its twin."

It was certainly very similar in shape, even down to the height of the main tower and its five accompanying towers.

The guards, who were clad in white, approached next to the door of the queen's carriage, and saluted her by crossing both of their hands across their chests. This meant everything to them in practicing the work of their religion.

However, despite their arrival, none of the priests or nobles stepped out of the carriages. The guards that were next to the carriages also remained in position without taking a single step.

‘Why was that?’ Agnes wondered. Then, an impressive song of praise began, which started with a wave of the wand by the conductor to the holy choir, who were in front of the entrance.

It was apparently a welcoming for the surprise visit by the queen, Romalian style.

“I guess we are supposed to remain here and listen to the song.”

Agnes muttered.

Young boys, whose pure singing voices had not changed yet, soothed the travel-wearied Henrietta’s heart and body with their song. The song couldn’t have been conducted better even if St. Aegis the 32nd himself did it, Henrietta thought to herself.

When the song ended, the conductor, a young boy, faced towards them.

It was a handsome young boy with whitish-blond hair.

“…moon eyes?”

His left and right eye-colors were different. Odd eyes… in Halkeginia it was called ‘moon eyes’. Usually, it was a bad omen. Still, to have a boy like him become the conductor of the choir, what circumstances did he have to go through?

Henrietta stuck her hand out of the window and waved at the choir as a gesture of appreciation of their hospitality. The boy conductor placed his hand over his chest and bowed to her. As he remained bowed, he approached the carriage. It was like the gesture of a military nobleman.

Then, he respectfully took her hand, like he was handling a gem, and brought it to his lips.

“Welcome to Romalia. I am your host, Julio Caesar.”

It was the person who saw Saito off in Albion before his battle against 70,000.

Henrietta, who was struck by his charming and refined gestures, spoke from

inside the carriage.

“You are a priest, right?”

“That is correct, your Majesty.”

“Despite that, you have the mannerisms like that of a nobleman. No, that was quite rude of me.”

Julio had a smirk on his face.

“It is because I have lived my entire life in the military. During the previous battles, I was but a mere footman in the lowest ranks of your Majesty.”

“Oh, is that so?”

A gloomy expression flashed on Henrietta’s face for a moment. Sad memories that she didn’t want to think about resurfaced, but she pushed them aside and continued the conversation.

“I offer you my thanks. It was a tough battle. You have done well.”

“Thankful words that really touch me. Well then, please come in, my master has been waiting for you.”

As Julio opened the door of the carriage, he took Henrietta’s hand.

Then, he took Agnes’s hand as well. At the other carriages, the delegates were each greeted by guides who took them to meet various members of Romalia’s government.

Waving his hand to Henrietta and Agnes, he guided them ahead.

As they started walking towards the cathedral, Henrietta remembered the invitation that St. Aegis the 32nd had given her.

‘Come 20 days before the ceremony. May God’s miracle watch over you.’

What exactly was God’s miracle?

With mixed anxiety and expectations, Henrietta shivered lightly.

As Henrietta walked into the entranceway of the cathedral, she was bathed in the light of 7 colors, streaming through the gleaming stained-glass windows.

“…beautiful…” Julio let out his thought with a smirk.

Henrietta proceeded towards the inner sanctum, where she was surprised with the scene in front of her. Here gathered a crowd of poor people, many whom she had passed by on carriage, wrapped in blankets and staring up at the ceiling. The first floor of the cathedral was truly like an example of a poorhouse.

“These people are..?”

Henrietta questioned, as Julio replied to her.

“They are the refugees who came from the ruins of the Albion war. Until we can find proper arrangements for these people, they are staying here momentarily.”

“Under the orders of his Holiness, the Pope?”

“Of course.”

Henrietta felt admiration for Pope Vittorio for this kind of treatment of the refugees. Even the church representatives were fervent about this. Needless to say, Romalia symbolized a cathedral that had open arms…

Julio spoke as if he was talking to himself.

“Unfortunately, Romalia is nothing like the 'kingdom of light' that these people have come to believe in. The world is full of contradictions. The Pope wishes to somehow sort through all of this contradictions for the truth.”

St. Aegis the 32nd, the Romalian Pope, currently was in the middle of a meeting in his office. While Henrietta had been sitting in the waiting room for quite some time, Julio's wonderful conversations as her host kept her from being bored.

About 30 minutes later, the door opened and some children popped out, making Henrietta jump. While it wasn't the most graceful of motions, she did manage to hold onto the portion of her dress wrapped in her hand.

"Chief, thank you very much."

The child who appeared to be the eldest bowed his head, with the others around him following suit. After the bowing, the children left cheerfully without noticing the Queen of Tristain right next to the door.

"I was praised by Chief for my 'good memory'."

"Me too! Me too!"

As Henrietta and Agnes tried to hide their bewilderment, Julio prompted Henrietta to enter.

"Well then, please enter. My master awaits."

The Pope's audience chamber was in disarray. The office of the Pope, the highest official of the religious order… rather than that, it looked more like the city's library or the room of an academy professor. The walls were tightly aligned with bookshelves, filled to the brim with collections of books. At a glance of the titles, it was not just titles of religious origins.

Most of them were in fact about historical records, especially those that revolved around wartimes or natural history.

There were even novels about dramas and comical stories mixed in.

On top of the large desk was more of the same type of books piled all around.

Lately, Romalia's publishing office issued a book of the 'true translation of the Founder's prayers'. It was a book that recorded the exploits of the Founder, making it a sacred text.

Dusting off that particular book, a man with long hair, in his twenties, was there. For a moment, Henrietta mistook the man as some kind of servant. However, when she gazed upon his noble, fine facial features, she was taken aback.

“…your Holiness.”

At her voice, St. Aegis the 32nd, Vittorio Cervale turned around.

“If it isn’t Henrieta-dono. Please wait a moment. I’m in the middle of tidying up…”

Julio asked in a joyful tone.

“Your Holiness, if I may, hasn’t Queen Henrietta come all the way from Tristain to speak with you?”

“I know I know, Julio. But I promised to teach the children writing and arithmetic during this time.”

Calling the queen of another country to come all the way here and making her wait is pretty surprising… even more so for the reason of educating the city’s children!

Feeling neither disrespected nor angered, Henrietta was mostly just dumbfounded.

Henrietta stared at the peculiar, but strangely beautiful air that Vittorio held… she wondered just what kind of person the Pope of Romalia was.

Just looking at the sudden summons that she received from him in Tristain, it was no mistake that a person such as him was unprecedented.

“For tidying, isn’t it better to call a servant to do it?”

Julio said with a bitter smile as he waved his hands at him. Julio’s attitude towards his master seemed to be overly familiar. This kind of relationship between a master and servant didn’t occur in Tristain or Gallia, so this also surprised Henrietta.

“I can’t leave this task to others. I have to organize the books myself. Otherwise,

I won’t know where it is when I want to read it.”

That statement from the Pope was a bit strange, making a giggle escape from Henrietta’s mouth. After finally finishing arranging the book, the Pope turned towards the queen.

“Sorry for the long wait. I give you the warmest welcomes.”

Words could not describe the charm that was held within his smile. While he was barely in his twenties, his eyes shone with the saintly affection of a much more experienced person.

To claim the role of the Pope at such a young age, how much talent and effort was required?

With that in mind, he certainly had the credentials. If not, he wouldn’t have been able to wear the Pope’s Mitre.

Just how much talent does this Pope hold…?

Henrietta was curious to know what dreams and ambitions he held.

For what reason did he call her out for official government business, such that she had to breathlessly rush to Romalia?

“As a devout follower of Founder Brimir, I have arrived as his Holiness wishes.”

Henrietta deeply bowed her head.

Officially, there were only two people whose position reigned above her. One is King Joseph of Gallia… and the other is Vittorio. Therefore, it was proper etiquette for her to bow lowly.

“Please raise your head. Why, this hat has already been passed to the prime minister of your country. There is no need for such formalities.”

Vittorio quickly mouthed to her. That was the truth. The prime minister of Tristain who was dispatched from Romalia, Cardinal Mazarin, had been recognized as the next Pope. However, during the election assembly 3 years ago, Mazarin had turned down the request sent from Romalia.

For that reason, there were even groundless rumors about the usurpation of the government of Tristain. However, these rumors more or less cleared up after Henrietta's coronation.

As for the true reason for his rejection, not even Queen Henrietta knew. Mazarin had never said a word about it.

"I am truly fond of Mazarin-dono. Now, your Highness, to make things simple, would you please pardon my request?"

"That being?"

Henrietta glanced back at Agnes, who hid behind her. Sensing that the main topic of the visit was at hand, she contemplated signaling Agnes to leave.

But, Vittorio shook his head.

"No, 'Miss Escort' here should also be present. In any case, it appears that the Miss is aware of the situation."

Henrietta peered back at Agnes. Agnes, slightly blushing with discomfort, nodded in agreement. It was the first time that Henrietta had seen such an expression on the face of the Captain of the Musketeer Corps, which surprised her.

Not even regarding the pardon for his question, Henrietta was pondering of a good way to break the silence.

"Have you noticed the contradiction of this country's beliefs?"

Vittorio instead asked Henrietta a question. A shocked expression hung on her face momentarily before she nodded seriously.

"Yes."

"It is as you see. While it is quite embarrassing, we are far from being the supposed 'kingdom of light' that we represent. On one hand, there are people who are lacking their daily bread while life goes on as the priests discuss about their own problems at each meeting. This is a world where faith is left on the ground and people everywhere focus on their own profits."

“If a may say, your Holiness has the authority to…”

“I do realize that. Even so, I am already trying my best. Taking into account of each church in every region, I barely have control through the main cathedral. Each sect of the church has a duty to reach out to the poor and construct shelters to take them in. In order for the people to obtain bread cheaply, free cities bearing no taxation should be established. But instead, banter and ridicule from some new followers have not been few. What kind of trash are they spouting! New followers and those claiming heresy are just trying to give their share of complaints. It’s the same as if I was facing the Reconquista.”

The Pope was trying his best. That was not a lie. Henrietta remembered the poor in the cathedral and the children on her way here.

“I have personally received support from an orphanage.”

Julio said proudly.

Vittorio nodded and continued speaking.

“However, I am at my limit. If I force the clergymen to involve themselves any further, it may cause some internal discord. The end result may be the spilling of blood from fellow followers of Founder Brimir. I need to step up and put on the mantle of the Pope that the people have chosen for me. No matter how just the cause… people will not wish to sacrifice their own prosperity. Also, I can no longer remain quiet about these issues. How foolish is it to fight each other over matters such as differences in doctrines and class? Ultimately, all people are the sons of God.”

Henrietta nodded. She felt the same way.

Vittorio spread out both his arms.

“Why is it that our doctrine has fallen so low? Why has our own clergymen excused themselves from God in order to indulge in the benefits of this day and age?”

With a voice full of regret, Vittorio exclaimed. His back trembled. He bit his lip strongly as if the pain were distracting him from his own lack of power.

“…It is because I don’t have enough power..”

“Power…?”

“Yes. It is like the last time I spoke with you about how ‘power is necessary’. We need to proudly show off the strength of the leader’s authority. To avoid being buried in unnecessary political strife and wars between the nobles and clergymen, we must demonstrate the true strength of God.”

“…is this about recovering the Holy Land from the elves?”

Vittorio nodded in confirmation.

“For the sake of awakening everyone to the true faith, there is no other option than to invoke ‘God’s miracle’ by recovering the Holy Land from the elves…”

“God’s miracle…”

Henrietta gasped.

That one phrase at the end of the letter that she had received earlier came back to mind.

Vittorio, at that point, turned around and faced towards one of his bookshelves. ‘Hump!’ he went with a blank expression, as his fingers grabbed a hold of the edge of the shelf, and he tried to slide it over.

However, he just didn’t have enough strength to move it at all. After sticking his tongue out at it, he motioned for his beloved Julio to come over.

“Julio. Please come give me a hand.”

“You should have requested me to in the first place.”

“Why, it wouldn’t do if I didn’t try it myself first.”

Both of them snickering at each other, they combined their power to slide the bookshelf over.

As the heavy object slid noisily, something behind it appeared…

Embedded in the wall was a large, elliptical-shaped mirror, 2 meters tall and about a meter wide.

“Is this the ‘miracle’?”

Henrietta asked, but Vittorio shook his head.

“No, the ‘miracle’ that I plan to use is not a material object. But even though you cannot touch it, that doesn’t mean that you cannot see it either.”

Vittorio prompted Julio to fetch his holy wand.

Julio picked up the small box that was placed on top of the table, containing a wand forged with holy materials, and respectfully presented it to Vittorio.

Taking it into his hand, Vittorio chanted a spell in a low voice like a prayer.

Clear notes of a beautiful ballad that she had never heard before graced the ears of Henrietta.

[Eulu Il Quoqen Sil Mari…]

It looked like the Pope was offering a prayer to God.

How much time had passed?

It seemed to have been quite a while. But in reality, had five minutes even passed since the aria began?

After the spell was finished, Vittorio gently pointed the wand at the mirror, as if offering it a blessing.

As Henrietta stared at the mirror, it began to shine.

The light suddenly disappeared, and something was starting to be reflected in the mirror.

It was not the reflection of the current room.

Looking at the scene, Henrietta let out a cry.

“This is..!”

It was the first time that Henrietta had ever been this frightened.

Vittorio muttered with satisfaction.

“This is the founder’s lineage… the ‘Void’.”

“The Void.”

“In ancient times, spells were prayers offered to God. Through these prayers to God, we obtained the miracle of magic. With the downfall of faith, God hides from us in these present times. This is an undeniable reality. An ancient spell such as this is appropriate as a prayer connecting us with God.”

“Your Holiness, even you…”

Henrietta looked at Vittorio as she was still shaking.

“Yes, Henrietta-dono. With my destiny to turn the people into servants of God, I have been given the miracle of the Void from God.”

“Oh…! Your Majesty. Your Majesty.”

Under the blinding holy radiance, Henrietta could not help but bend down her knees.

“We have to gather them, in order to have a grand ‘prayer’ and then to call upon a grand miracle.”

Chapter 2: Saito's Decision

The fifth month of the year, the month of Eir, was already half over as it was the day of Yul in the 3rd week, Aiello. The sun lit all of the Academy’s four central courtyards as the sky was clear.

After school, the students who had finished their classes would go to their favorite courtyard to discuss where to go during their vacation, about Tristania’s new ‘tavern’, about who was dating who, the delayed Frigg Ball which had been scheduled for the week of Tiwaz… hitting up cheerful topics to kill time.

However, the students’ cheerful atmosphere was suddenly broken by unexpected intruders.

“Aaaaaaaaaahhhh! The shameless chevaliers have arrived!”

“Everybody! This isn’t good! Run!”

The girls’ screams went through out the Austri Plaza. The boys raised their eyebrows against these guys who did whatever they felt like (in the end, they received treatment worse than bugs), they couldn’t be forgiven.

Walking proudly with a bunch of scornful gazes were the members of the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit. They had solemn expressions from the beginning to the end, separated in two columns as they walked forward.

Commander Guiche, who was leading them, raised his imitation rose wand. Malicorne, who was behind him shouted.

“Squadron! Stop!”

Their movements shifted to a halt simultaneously. This was the fruit of their training. To the Knight Corps, “marching forward” was an important job. It looks like the one hour training they had every day had effect.

Guiche lowered his raised wand. Then, Malicorne shouted loudly again.

“Squadron! Prepare yourselves!”

The students of the Knight Corps drew something from their backs. Instead of wands, there were brooms. They were using big brooms made of Berala fern leaves.

“Targets! All kinds of trash in Austri Plaza! Sweep! Sweep! Sweep!”

The squadron scattered while shouting “Waaaaaah!” as they started cleaning in a sweeping motion. Since all of the Academy of Magic’s nobles threw food scraps and empty bottles around as they please. It was normally the maids and servants who patiently cleaned after them.

As for why the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit had to clean the plaza after school in place of the servants, it was because of what happened three days ago. It was punishment the Academy gave them for peeping into the girls’ bath.

Malicorne withdrew and approached the area where the school girls were gathered.

“Yaaaaaaaaaaah! The shameless knight is coming!”

Malicorne, his face showing a smile mixed of perversion and joy, flew toward the middle of the schoolgirls.

“How can you, young ladies! Throw trash on the ground as and when you please!"

The girls, who saw Malicorne in this state, fled one after another.

“Don’t come here! Don’t come!”

“But, there is trash there too… on the ground…” Thus, Malicorne, with a mysteriously joyful expression, approached the girls.

“Ma, Malicorne-sama…”

In the middle of the fleeing girls, there was a reserved, black-haired maiden who

had come to listen to Malicorne’s poems at some point.

“Hey, Brigitta. How’ve you been?”

Her forehead glimmering with sweat, Brigitta tearfully shouted at Malicorne, who had a bright smile on his face.

“Malicorne-sama, you liar! I-I didn’t think that you would actually be the type of person to peep at people when they bathe!”

Malicorne, who was picking trash, said as if he was speaking to himself.

“I’m a man.”

“Malicorne-sama…”

“… sometimes when you know that you will lose, you still have to keep fighting!”

Huu…Malicorne smiled absentmindedly.

“I don't understand what you mean! Ma, Malicorne-sama is trash among people!”

Ding! Malicorne’s back went stiff.

“Trash…, you said trash…, aaaah…”

“I take it back! You are below trash!”

The overly jolly Malicorne rolled on the ground and started trembling strangely. He really was a troubled fatty.

On the other side, Commander Guiche’s face had a nervous expression while he hurriedly cleaned the ground with his broom. Suddenly, the ground surface broke apart. Guiche’s mole familiar stuck its head out.

Guiche’s tears blurred his vision for a moment.

“Verdandi!”

Guiche quickly kneeled down and embraced his dear familiar's head.

"… Forgive the shameful me. Forget the fault I've committed because of a thoughtless moment!"

The mole Verdandi used his gauntlet-like claws to pat Guiche's head.

"One thoughtless moment you say? You dare say that when you have thoughtless moments all the time!"

A harsh voice came from behind the gentle Verdandi.

"Montmorency!"

For certain, the girl with dazzling, blond, curly hair standing there was Montmorency. She looked downwards at Guiche, who was kneeling on the ground, and said while looking at him with a cold glare.

"At least now I knowwhat kind of guy you are. Goodbye."

Montmorency opened the wine bottle she was holding, and dumped it on Guiche's head.

"You said goodbye! What does this mean? Montmorency!"

Guiche, his head soaked of wine, shouted.

"It means what it means literally. I say, you should have known when I rejected your invitation for the dance."

"Aaaaaahhh…"

Guiche held his head on the ground. Legend says that couples at the Ball of Frigg will be together forever. Although there isn't any proof, a myth is still a myth.

But, since the peeping affair, Guiche didn't have the opportunity to have a conversation with Montmorency. He had planned to use the opportunity of next week's ball to invite her as a dancing partner. To be on good terms with her, he would hold a giant bouquet of roses and say:

“This bouquet is not yet complete. The last flower… is you.” It was only Guiche who could use this comparison to invite her.

But Montmorency ignored Guiche’s hand, turned her head and left. Guiche, still holding the rose bouquet, stood expressionlessly and didn’t move…

“Then, is it a sign that we are breaking up?”

“Exactly. Don’t speak to me again. So goodbye.”

Guiche hung his head deeply, cursing his own foolishness.

Reynal, who assumed the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit clerical affairs, was working ascetically, picking trash far away.

“It looks like Reynal is really serious… you really can’t judge someone by his appearance!”

“Shh! That kind of guy is the scariest! There has to be unthinkable thoughts running through his mind!”

Reynal, unable to bear the whispers of the girls, looked up and said:

“No! I tried to stop them! I tried at the very beginning! But, But…”

Looking at Tiffania encircled by classmates from afar, Reynal dropped to the ground.

“Aaaaaaah! At that time I was just thinking whether they are real or not… Oh God, Founder Brimir, please accept from your sincere servant, my deep regrets! I shall whip myself to punish the shameless me!”

Reynal chanted an incantation and created an air whip. Slowly removing his shirt, he used the air whip to continuously hit his back.

The schoolgirls on the scene all ran away screaming.

The remaining guys’ situations were similar. Their bodies momentarily shivered. They clenched their teeth, cursing their own situation.

“Really…I don’t like people who know no shame. They are a disgrace to nobility. It’s a wonder why Her Majesty decided to make them part of her Imperial Guard.”

A shocked Louise exclaimed. From the window of her living quarters in the girls’ dormitory, the pitiful scene that stretched out at Austri plaza could be seen…

In front of the pinkish-blond haired girl sat another girl with black hair. In front of them rested a set of teacups. Siesta, dressed in plain clothing, took a sip of tea from her cup and murmured with an expression of slight disgust.

“Tr-truly.”

Siesta recalled the scene from her memory and blushed.

“…but, we were also considerably shameless ourselves. I mean…that time… with that thing from Jessica…and the…”

Louise’s face also flushed red as well.

Louise glared at her, implying that she ‘drop the topic’. Then, she lifted her chin up at the attending maid.

“Seconds.”

The maid’s headband on top of black hair trembled as a low, shaky voice uncharacteristic of the attire muttered.

“…Isn’t putting your familiar in such an appearance quite shameless on your part?”

Dressed in maid attire and serving the both of them was in fact one Hiraga Saito.

And lo and behold, his appearance was a miserable one indeed.

“It’s fine. You like maids after all.”

“That’s not the problem.”

“The problem is that someone caused an incident.”

Louise glared at Saito sharply.

“If you were truly the cause, you would have joined the sniveling, hated bunch out there sweeping the courtyard.”

“Hey, how many times have I said that I was dragged there in the first place without knowing anything about peeking already!”

Saito pinched his maid outfit and yelled.

“If I had known that you were going to make me wear this, I would have been better off sweeping with them!”

Louise slowly finished off her tea and then shot Saito a glare.

“It’s not just for the peeking.”

“Grr…”

“What the hell were you doing with that girl?”

“She was trying to help me! So you go out of your way to pull me out of the cleaning punishment and instead casually turn me into a maid. I am grateful. How’d you know that I always wanted to be a maid?”

Saito said unpleasantly, while wearing a borrowed outfit from the Academy’s largest maid. Somehow, he was the only one who didn’t receive the punishment the others got, but that didn’t mean that he was excused. While he did arrive at the scene without knowing anything…, the fact that he peeked didn’t change. He thought about whether any of the Knight Corps had ratted him out.

On top of that, the cleaning punishment was better than the maid outfit, even with all the belittling by others. Saito still had his pride.

“Anyways, I want another cup. Pour some for Siesta also.”

Saito snatched up the teapot and poured tea for both of them.

“…uh, I’m sorry Saito-san.”

Siesta bowed deeply to Saito.

“Hm? Why are you apologizing, Siesta?”

“…Well, at that time, didn’t I kick you out of my window? Even though it was because of the potion…”

“It’s ok. In the end, you didn’t use the potion.”

Siesta smiled widely.

Louise interrupted Saito with an irritated voice.

“Enough of this now. Anyways, I don’t ever want to hear the word ‘potion’ again. Look, you are a maid right now, so go get us some snacks.”

Siesta stared at Saito absentmindedly.

“…what’s wrong, Siesta?”

“You won’t get angry?”

“I won’t.”

“Uh… Saito-san, as I thought, you are really cute in that. It suits you.”

“This does?”

Saito grabbed the skirt and flapped it.

“Yes…, I think it was the right choice.”

“Right choice…, don’t tell me that you were the one that chose this outfit?”

“Yes, that’s right. Miss Vallière kept going on and on about a suitable punishment for you. Something that was a change from the usual, painful punishment that she inflicted on poor Saito-san. Then, I thought if not painful, what about something cute?”

“So, this?”

“Yes.”

Siesta smile was as wide as it could be.

Saito was disappointed with the people in this room.

In this room, he had no allies. Oh yeah, he had no one anyways.

With that, he really couldn’t help being devious. Although he shouldn’t be, that was part of his nature.

While humming a playful tune, Saito opened the cookie tin that was placed on top of the closet.

Next to it was a jar of cream spread for the cookies.

First, Saito took out the cookies and placed them on a plate in front of Louise and Siesta. Then, while spinning around like a ballerina, Saito brought out the jar of cream in front of them.

“Mademoiselle.”

“… what?”

“… This, is cream right? If you spread some on your cookies, it will be more delicious.”

Louise’s temple twitched.

“Oh, is that so?”

“The two of you seem to know this well…”

Saito gave a polite bow.

At that point, a small shudder passed through him.

However, Louise calmly took up the jar and uncapped the lid. Using a spoon, she spread the cream on a cookie. But then..., her stoic expression disappeared. Gripping the spoon with all her might, she smashed the cookie into pieces all over the table.

Siesta trembled in fear as she stood up.

“Uh, Saito-san!”

“Y-yes, Madam!”

“I’m sure I said this before, but nothing more than kissing happened! The reason we were covered in cream at the time was because of the potion! Somehow, because the effects transferred many times, they were not as strong!”

“Y-yes.”

“I-I did lick a little bit, but that was all! I’m still pure! Um, I’m saving that part for…, po-”

“Quiet!”

Louise stopped her before Siesta could get any further.

Then, she stood up and stretched. Calmly walking over to a hunched-over Saito, who had sweat and tears streaming down him, she smiled widely.

“Oh really. You are such a dutiful familiar.”

“How very kind of you.”

“…after all, whenever I am about to snap, you know it well. You know it too---well. You always come up with a good reason for me to vent.”

“Then, I shall take my leave. Really, I knew the outcome, which wasn’t good. If you would please, I’ll be careful from now on.”

“Being careful is fine, but before that Saito, you have to receive a light punishment. After all, you were being devious.”

“I see. A light one. Ok.”

“However, I am really nice. Since it is a light punishment, it will not be the usual. I’m going to give you a choice. Well, you better think hard about your choice because it may be the most important decision in your life.”

“Ok.”

“One: You regret that you were ever born.”

“That’s no good.”

“Two: You think that you would be better off dead.”

“That’s also bad.”

With a deep breath, Louise nimbly leapt on top of a chair like a cat. Hooking Saito by the neck with her foot, she tossed him onto the bed.

“Make your choice. Here. Here! What about the cream! W-What did I say about the cream!"

Saito was in the middle of apologizing over and over again as Louise kicked him but her attacks stopped abruptly.

Louise got off him and stood up.

“Hmmm? You love cream, right! Ok, nice cream! Nice cream! From today on,

I’ll be ‘Nice Cream’.”

“What the hell is ‘Nice Cream’!”

The party had just begun.

At the same time, in the headmaster’s office…

“I see… As I thought, we were not able to receive permission.”

The one that said that was Mister Colbert, shaking his head with disappointment. In front of him was a large table in which Old Osman was sitting there, puffing his pipe.

“I applaud your enthusiasm. I too wish that we could do something for him.”

“I am thankful for your words.”

“However, Mister Colbert. The royal place is one big issue. Out of Halkeginia’s lands, it has the worst air of unrest flowing through it… Therefore, their reply will persistently be ‘no permission to fly’.”

“It is… as I thought.”

“Jokes aside, your face belies the stubbornness of your character. Aren’t you like a starved thief waiting to prowl again into the territory of a mansion?”

“Mhmm, I surely must be.”

Colbert recalled the earlier adventure that he personally helped with and scratched his head. With such an incident, the affected country shouldn’t have any reason to let something just ‘pass over their heads’. For the soured relationship with the royal castle of Gallia, the request of one nobleman would of course be brushed aside.

“Well, don’t lose hope. At least, take heed of this account. Later on, I’ll give you my support…, I have no choice but to accept your wishes.”

Old Osman handed Colbert a parchment letter. On the letter was Colbert’s

signature along with a written resignation letter.

“You are an indispensible person at this academy. I’m sorry, but I don’t plan to let you go.”

“I had not planned on retiring yet. I was simply going to expand my horizons for a short time.”

Old Osman’s eyes narrowed at Colbert. For a moment, a glint in his eyes shone.

“Your forte is in research. I realize that. One of my guilty pleasures is that various people that I come upon become a target of my interest. That is my opinion. Ah, new things to see and hear, and all of the novel experiences I have. I still see your form from that time in the back of my eyelids. I feared that you wouldn’t be able to return. But that choice you made has all but disappeared as a haze in the back of your mind.”

Colbert couldn’t object to this, as it would make the situation worse.

“It’s true that I owe you a debt of gratitude, and I won’t hesitate to repay you…”

“If you would just do this, I have nothing more to say.”

“You are overestimating my capabilities. For twenty years time, I have been thinking about this neglected thing.”

Old Osman coughed as a signal that Colbert was making it worse.

“This is how times of peace are. Boredom causes interests and memories to snatch our attention.”

“Then, even in the ominous clouds that surround present time, I take it that I will be under your service for the rest of my life with no expectations of my own?”

“I didn’t say anything of the sort. Rest of your life? What a grandiose man you are! Didn’t I say? Learn from the situation. Hmph! If the time comes, the only thing I will oppose is your travel expenses. But, for now, no. That is final. Mister…”

Old Osman stood up and placed a hand on Colbert’s back.

“Well, don’t make such a sad face. I know of a great place in the town of Tickton to lift your spirits up. It’s a place called the ‘Charming Fairy Inn’, where your wine glass can be filled by waitresses in skimpy outfits… Let’s go have a glass, my treat.”

“If it’s that place, I know of it.”

“Well, that makes things easy. I will call for some horses. Wait, at my age, riding horses will be tough. For times like this, my dragon is needed.”

“For today…, I think I’ll pass.”

“What’s this, didn’t you love women? Even more so than me? Really? What kind of wind is blowing today?”

With a cough to hide his embarrassment, Colbert put on a serious face.

“I need to deliver this notice to a friend of mine now.”

As Colbert said that, Old Osman shook his head at the party pooper.

“As you get older, it gets harder to enjoy things. To take away such little pleasures from an old man…”

Colbert excused himself with a bow and started to leave the headmaster’s office.

“Wait.”

“Is there something else?”

Old Osman was looking at the sky outside his window. Dusk appeared to be approaching.

“…really, it’s not fun getting old. Even though I don’t want to, I can see the color of the sky.”

“Y-yea.”

A sudden change from before, an empty, solemn expression plastered his wrinkled face as Old Osman spoke again.

“Though the war is over, no sign of the dark clouds hanging over this world can be seen. Sorry, this is a regretful topic…, but we are necessary for these times.”

“What is necessary?”

Colbert questioned with a serious face.

“That boy, his master, his companion and also all of the excellent instructors like you. All your power is necessary. So for just a bit longer, I want all of you to accompany me in my decrepit world.”

Colbert mumbled that it would be fine with him.

“…how is the boy? He is not a person of this world. Despite that, he has repeatedly aided this country. Simply awarding him with nobility would not be enough. Despite that, can he still talk about ‘aiding’ us?”

With a gloomy voice, Colbert softly replied.

‘Are we not nobles? Can we not lift up our own wands and risk ourselves to do something?”

“You are correct. If this was Tristain’s sole problem, I would probably give the same answer. However… with the upcoming ‘crisis’ in our hands, I’m afraid that this is not the only thing we have to worry about.

Colbert swallowed his breath.

“The price that will be paid to save Halkeginia will not be paid by nobles, but by heroes. People like you. And… like that boy. Please don’t bear a grudge on me. Seeking out these heroes is not a task to be done by others. In this day and age… times are quickly changing. Someone has to look out for it. Please understand, Mister Colbert.”

In Louise’s room, the dreadful party was still storming.

Fearing her own involvement, Siesta retreated from the room. Even after that, the scuffle between Louise and Saito seemed to continue without end.

The furious Louise was nimble. Like a cat pouncing all around the room, she inflicted damage on Saito with accuracy. Saito finally managed to grab onto the bouncing Louise.

“Let go of me! I still haven’t finished punishing you!”

“… hey, this has gotten more out of hand than usual!”

Saito threw Louise onto the bed.

“Kya!”

Covering the yelling Louise with a blanket, he pinned her down.

…….

With that done, Louise settled down as if a demon was exercised from her. She was too quiet though, so Saito started to worry and flipped the blanket to check on her.

At that point…

Louise looked up at him with swollen eyes.

“W-What?”

Saito said to her.

“…I’m still angry.”

Louise replied in a defeated tone.

“The one that should be angry is me. M-making me wear this of all things…”

Ignoring Saito’s protest, Louise instead fumed about her own dissatisfaction.

“You like maids after all.”

Narrowing her eyes, she stared at Saito. Even though it was a joke, there was a strangely tempting ring to it. For a moment, Saito became flustered like his heart had stopped.

“Well, I like maids, but it’s the person inside that matters. It’s not like I particularly like this piece of clothing, especially more so when I’m wearing it myself.”

Teary-eyed, Louise said.

“If I hadn’t been around, you would have spread cream onto Siesta.”

“I-I wouldn’t have done that! What the hell!”

“L-like a dog, you would have licked the cream.”

“No, I wouldn’t!”

“Yes, you would!”

Louise pouted loudly. Looking at such a face, a grin floated onto Saito’s face.

“What? Are you jealous?”

“I’m not jealous! I’m not, I’m not!”

Louise violently flailed around. Saito tried to hold her down, though it was futile.

“Hey, hey. Calm down~.”

As expected of Louise, she gave a kick to Saito’s nether regions. However…, since Saito was currently wearing a skirt, she couldn’t aim very well, so her foot only managed to hit his thighs.

Triumphantly, Saito stirred up Louise.

“Hey~, you really love your familiar, don’t cha, Louise-chan~.”

With a face dyed completely red, Louise bit his arm. But…, it didn’t hurt him at all. An evil smile drifted instead on Saito’s lips.

“What’s wrong, Miss Vallière? It doesn’t hurt at all? I see! You love me after all. You love your familiar that does nothing but act like a dog, don’t cha. Of course, you wouldn’t bite me for real.”

Louise instantly let go, and yelled loudly at him.

“I-I don’t like you!”

“Well then why?”

Saito glared at her forcefully.

From that, Louise uneasily frowned and looked to the side.

“…be-because you’re my familiar.”

“You’re still saying that?”

“Yes! Yes, I am! Because I’m unfortunate. And… that I have Founder Brimir’s magic. I instinctively get angry when you ignore me when you are supposed to be protecting me. I really am quite unfortunate.”

“Liar!”

“It’s not a lie. It’s the truth.”

Louise mumbled softly with a pout, as if she was telling herself that.

Saito sighed deeply.

“I get it.” Saito said, standing up.

“What do you mean you get it~ ~ ~?”

Louise asked him as she started getting up, with the bedding still covering half her face.

“I’m going to look for a way home.”

“Eh?”

Louise’s eyes got really wide. As if testing Louise, Saito continued speaking.

“Thanks for taking care of me. Goodbye. I will be taking my leave. If I make it back home, you will be able to summon another familiar. Have him protect you

from now on. Later.”

“Hey! Wait a minute! Why all of a sudden?! No no no!”

Leaping out of bed, Louise stood in front of the door with her arms spread. Then, she noticed Saito’s expression. He had what looked like a strange smirk floating on his face.

“…Oi!”

Louise’s face was dyed completely red. As if she was going to smack Saito’s cheek, she struggled to hold her hand back.

“How dare you trick me…”

As her angry tone started rising, Saito suddenly stared at her face with a serious expression, which made Louise swallow her next words.

“I love you, Louise.”

That phrase was a surprise attack, such that Louise couldn’t move.

“I-I, someone like you…”

Before she could finish her sentence, her lips were covered.

“Mmh……”

From the sudden kiss, all of her energy drifted away from her body. Saito held her up, as she started melting to the floor. With him holding her tight, Louise couldn’t think of anything at all. She was really such a simple girl.

As their lips parted, Louise mumbled softly.

“…S-someone like you should just go home already.”

“I-it’s not like I don’t want to go home.”

Louise started getting angry again and closed her eyes. Saito embraced her again, and like that, he moved her to the bed and laid her down.

Louise continued to lay there motionlessly with her eyes closed.

Sweat started to run profusely from Saito's forehead, and he let out a deep breath that he had been holding in. The smoothness of his actions had stopped dead. He could no longer act like one of those suave guys anymore. With panicky, stiff motions, Saito sat down next to Louise.

"……."

With Louise still blushing deep red, he laid down next to her.

Was it really ok?, Saito thought. Should he take it as a sign it was ok? With all of the usual misunderstandings that made her mad and led to failures, Saito was quite skeptical.

First, he took a deep breath.

A deep breath, which he then exhaled.

But after that, he still had no idea what to do. Instead, he wanted to run away in frustration. If he did that though, he knew that he would regret it for the rest of his life.

As many vague questions danced around his head, his steaming head was certainly overheating.

"Uh…, for the moment, can I see your boobs?"

Louise's eyebrows rose. Even without Louise's complex about her size, this was not a question to be asked usually. However, Louise accepted his rather blunt request.

For now, Saito started undressing her. He was extra careful to be gentle and delicate, so that he wouldn't overstep her expectations. With her eyebrows twitching, Louise bore with the situation.

"I'm undoing the b-bu-buttons."

Those foolish words that tried to hide his embarrassment bothered Louise a bit. Without thinking, she opened her mouth and glared straight at Saito.

“I love you.”

Although her words were a bit rushed, the pure feeling of them was like a magic spell cast straight into Saito’s heart. Pink flowers were swirling inside of his head as he looked at Louise, who looked away with enchanted eyes and her mouth slightly open.

Basically, the thought of Louise undressing not only affected her, but also Saito greatly.

With shaky hands, Saito unbuttoned the first button on her shirt.

A gust of wind blew into the room from the window, and both Louise and Saito fell to the floor.

“Gya!”

“W-what was that?!”

The two of them rushed to their feet. Outside the window, a wind dragon was floating around. On its shoulders was a blue haired girl who, as usual, had an emotionless expression.

“Tabitha!”

Saito shouted.

“Hey! What are you peeking for?!” Don’t get in the way… er, I mean thanks for stopping him from attacking me!”

Louise’s pride had instantly kicked in, but as she shouted that, the fires of jealousy quickly raged in her.

Why did she have to butt in?! That girl!

Ah, it must have been the work of that idiot mutt.…

Those thoughts ran through her head.

Then, something hit her. From the back of her mind, the incident at Alvis dining hall that involved a naked Tabitha with Saito on top of her resurfaced.

What's this? She was just helping him that time, wasn't it?

That was definitely a lie!

Really…, that guy…

Forgetting all about the situation, Louise delivered a swift kick to the back of Saito's head as he stood there dumbfounded still.

"Geh!"

Saito's head dropped straight forward and to the ground from the kick. Louise barked at him while placing her foot down.

"Y-You, you did lay a hand on Tabitha, didn't you?"

"Huh? I don't get what you're saying!"

"Quiet! If you had been telling the truth, there wouldn't have been a reason for her to blow us away just then."

Louise was kicking Saito everywhere at a speed of 3 kicks per second.

"I'm sure you used the same words with me as you did that time! Now, tell me! Here, here! Like, 'let me see your boobs?' I'm not stupid! Being all sweet with me! All sweet!"

Not knowing what the hell was going on, Saito groaned.

"That's not true."

Tabitha softly denied Louise's misunderstandings.

"It's fine, so you be quiet!"

Then, Tabitha pointed with her wand to something behind Louise.

“A guest.”

Louise turned around. Mister Colbert had arrived at some point. He was standing in the doorway, holding onto the doorknob with a blank expression.

“Sorry for barging in suddenly.”

Colbert said, while scratching his head. Both Saito and Louise shrank in their chairs in embarrassment. At some point, Siesta had returned to set some tea out for them. Tabitha was sitting on the window sill, content with reading her book. It seemed that she was planning on staying there to keep an eye on Saito.

Then, Colbert, who was also sitting in a chair, let out a big sigh. Apparently, there was some matter.

“What’s wrong, Sensei?”

Saito looked towards his water with his head down as Colbert sighed. It seemed like he didn’t even notice the current maid attire Saito had on. What incredible concentration this teacher had.

“First, I have to apologize to you.”

“Wha?”

Saito looked blankly as Colbert started explaining the details.

It’s about the expedition to the East on the Ostland. We will not be able to head east because Gallia will not allow us to pass through its airspace.

Whether it’s merchant ships or exploration ships, foreigners must have official documentation in order to pass through their territory, in which permission is obtained through allied countries.

Colbert once again let out a deep sigh.

“You couldn’t obtain permission from Gallia?”

Saito asked with a concerned tone. For that matter, something was off. A

situation as simple as this shouldn’t cause such a heavy expression. Well, getting permission from Gallia was not exactly something that they knew much about…

“No, first of all I don’t have a permit for that country. I asked Old Osman to arrange for one…”

Colbert shook his head.

A strange silence enveloped them. Then, Colbert slowly looked up.

“… was it that much of a surprise?” Saito asked.

Saito was a bit confused, which started making him flustered.

“Well, to be honest, it was a surprise...”

Colbert’s expression got sour.

“But, anyways, there are some unsettled matters to attend to, so for now I’m staying here…, no, I want to stay here.”

Louise’s eyes opened wide.

Tabitha raised her eyebrows briefly.

Siesta’s cheeks turned red.

The frankness of his own statement personally surprised Saito. Truly, it was a heartfelt statement. Taking a glance at Louise’s face to the side, he confirmed it to himself.

“You may be giving up a great opportunity. If that is the case, you may never be able to return.”

As Colbert said that, images of his friends ‘performing their services’ in the courtyard floated within Saito’s heart. However stupid and short-sighted they were, and how much of simpletons they could be… they were friends that faced the dreaded dragon knights for his sake.

With guys like them here…, it wouldn’t be so bad to just stay in this world.

“Well, when the time comes, I’ll worry about it then.”

At Saito’s carefree statement, Colbert shook his head in disappointment.

“Unlike you, I cannot wait patiently for events to happen. I want to see it for myself! A world that revolves around the principles of technology, rather than magic! A world with different values, different people… Well, if you say so, I suppose we can postpone it for now.”

Shaking his head all the while, Colbert exited the room.

Some time passed between the inhabitants left in the room. The first one to break the silence was Siesta, whose voice was full of glee, embarrassment, and comfort towards Saito.

“U-um! It is really unfortunate for Saito-san~! But, but, I am just a bit glad. I mean, I am glad that Saito-san has decided to stay in this world for us,” she said.

“Miss Vallière thinks so too!” Louise turned her head away, staring at her water.

“I’m not glad at all.”

Louise replied with an angry tone.

“Since you have to stay here anyways, it can’t be helped.”

“That cannot be true! Saito-san has helped Miss Vallière and the rest of us and saved Tristain from its crises countless times, hasn’t he!”

“Well, I will acknowledge that. But, I did not summon him to seduce other girls.”

Louise looked at both Siesta and the silently reading Tabitha. At that, Saito casually mumbled.

“A-ah, it was unfortunate for me. After all, I’m such a selfish, undutiful familiar…”

“Then it would be better if you went home.”

“If I could, I would have right away.”

The two of them were heartlessly exchanging verbal blows with their backs turned. Then, Saito put his foot in his mouth.

“But, that’s not all I’m dissatisfied with.”

That statement made Louise red in anger.

Then, Saito made his way to the door.

Louise stared at Saito with a face like that of an uneasy puppy. But, she refused to ask where was he going.

“Saito-san, where are you going?”

“A walk.”

“Like that, you are?”

Saito looked down at himself, still clad in the maid outfit. Saito began changing in a panic.

Siesta ‘kya-ed’ from overload as she tried to hide her face from the scene. But her fingers didn’t quite hide her eyes. Tabitha continued reading her book, completely ignoring the scene. Louise blushed and turned away.

After he finished changing, he appeared to have remembered something and started looking for it. That particular item had ended up on top of Louise’s things. Grabbing it, Saito left the room.

The door closed with a bang, drowning the room in a brief silence. Acting like nothing ever happened, Louise wordlessly grabbed a snack from the tabletop and started eating. Not having any appetite, Siesta started cleaning.

As Louise silently nibbled on her cookie, she looked towards Tabitha sitting on the window sill and the darkness of night behind her.

“It’s getting late. You should head back to your own room.”

However, Tabitha neither replied nor moved. The sound of pages turning, Louise nibbling her cookie, and Siesta sweeping the floor were the only things heard in

her room.

“Hey Tabitha, are you planning to stay here tonight?”

Tabitha nodded slightly.

“Why? Don’t tell me because Saito is here?”

Siesta’s broom immediately stopped. Tabitha nodded again.

“What is the meaning of this?”

Somewhat seething in jealously, Louise approached her. Tabitha closed her book and faced her.

“You are going overboard.”

“What? You have a problem with that? I’m telling you that Saito is my familiar. I am free to deliver whatever punishment I see fit.”

“Even so, I cannot allow you to endanger him. Eventually, he will get hurt.”

“What? Have you taking a liking to him?”

“Not a ‘liking’.”

Louise’s eyes narrowed.

“…I’m saying that you are trespassing onto some serious grounds.”

Tabitha looked straight at Louise, who was seething with jealousy and anger.

“So what?”

Louise furiously took out her wand. Tabitha readied her large wand at the same time. Louise’s body swayed from the impressive magical aura flaring around her.

An aura of ‘void.’

The growing jealousy in her heart was fueling Louise’s magic.

Likewise, an icy aura comparable to Louise's enveloped around Tabitha's body, chilling the air around her. To onlookers, they appeared as two weak girls locked in a stare down. In fact, an ominous atmosphere spread around them, much like the calm before a confrontation between a dragon and a wyvern of equal strength.

Instantly, Siesta picked up on the bloodthirsty air between them.

"Well! You two! Well, well!"

Breaking the deadlock, Siesta got between the two girls and handed them wine glasses.

"I got ahold of an old bottle of Anjou wine! For now, shall we try some? Well? Well? Please put away those dreaded wands!"

While still staring at each other, the two girls downed their wine.

"Hmph…"

Once again, Siesta filled their glasses.

Louise and Tabitha downed that as well. Emptying the first bottle, Siesta brought the next one out and continued pouring more wine.

While this was going on, Saito had arrived at the neighboring Tower of Fire, where Mister Colbert's laboratory is. The object that he hastily picked up as he left was still clutched in his arms. After knocking on the door, Kirche peeked her head out. Clad in a skimpy negligee, it was quite a bothersome distraction for Saito's eyes.

"Ah, Saito."

"Is Sensei here?"

"He's here but… He had a few drinks and has been mumbling about something. Is something the matter?"

As Saito got closer, Colbert, apparently drunk, was sprawled on top of the table.

“Sensei, what happened?”

“…Mmhmm. Royalty! And noblemen, blast them! Magic is all they ever think about! Even though there are plenty of undiscovered technical and cultural things in this world… All of these meaningless quarrels for the sake of pride… Blasted superiors, the lot of them!...”

Not receiving permission from the royal court appeared to be a considerable shock to him. Saito had taken a liking to the Colbert before him now.

If it was him…, perhaps he could hand it over, Saito thought.

Saito tapped on Colbert’s shoulder.

“…mmhmm. Wha? Aah, Saito-kun. What brings you?”

His breath reeking of alcohol, Colbert lifted his head up.

“Sensei…, here.”

Saito set the object that he was carrying on top of the table.

“Hm? This is…, what exactly?”

Looking at the silver, rectangular flat object, Colbert’s eyes lit up.

“… This is from your world? There’s no doubt!”

Instantly, Colbert’s drunkenness disappeared from his face.

“Yes. It was the only thing that I was carrying when I arrived here…, it’s called a notebook computer.”

“Marvelous! Truly marvelous! Look at this, Miss Zerbst. It’s like the craftsmanship of Germania!”

Next to him, Kirche had an impression like that of a helper looking over his best interests, as she also marveled at it.

“No, Jean. This is much more elaborate than Germania craftsmanship. Hey Saito, what exactly is this? Is this a jewelry box crafted by someone from your

world?”

The words ‘your world’ rang through Saito as he looked over at Colbert.

“… Forgive me. I accidentally let that slip.”

“Isn’t it fine, if it’s me? Hey, I won’t tell anyone. The fact that you are a person from another world.”

Kirche nodded with a carefree smile. Honestly, he didn’t mind Kirche knowing. Knowing that she was in fact an honorable girl with tight lips, Saito simply mumbled ‘oh well.’

“Sensei, this wasn’t crafted to be a jewelry box. How do I put this…, while it’s kind of hard to explain, it can be thought of like a type of library that is packed full of books.”

“A library? This thing? Truly, surprising! This small box being called a library of sorts! This world of yours, just how exactly does it work?”

Kirche’s eyes were also wide open.

“Are we supposed to shrink and enter it?”

“No…, that’s not it. Words, pictures, and sound are made smaller into what is called ‘data’, and that data is packed into this thing. I did say that it was a library at first, but it can really store much more information than what you can find in a library. That stuff appears here. It is like a magical mirror that projects an image.”

Saito opened up his notebook computer to show them the LCD monitor.

“Speaking of which, is information of your world in here?”

“… since I’m the only one that has used it, I don’t think anything important is in here. What this machine can really do is set up a terminal, which can exchange information with various other people.”

“In other words, with other people far away from you. Is this what you mean?”

Saito gave him a nod.

In reality, he had only used his computer to surf the internet, so there really wasn't much data. Well, even if he were to have some data, whether that would be of any use is another story.

"Then, if you were to use this, you would be able to access the information of your world. Am I correct?"

At this point, Saito mumbled in disappointment.

"Well, if I only had power."

"Power? What is this power?"

"It's that thing. Electricity. This machine runs on electricity."

"Electricity! I see!"

Colbert sighed.

"Hey Jean, what is electricity?"

"In this world, it exists in many forms. Like a flash of lightning or the shock that you get from touching the staircase on a cold, winter day. These are all forms of electricity. However, there are not many scholars that study this…"

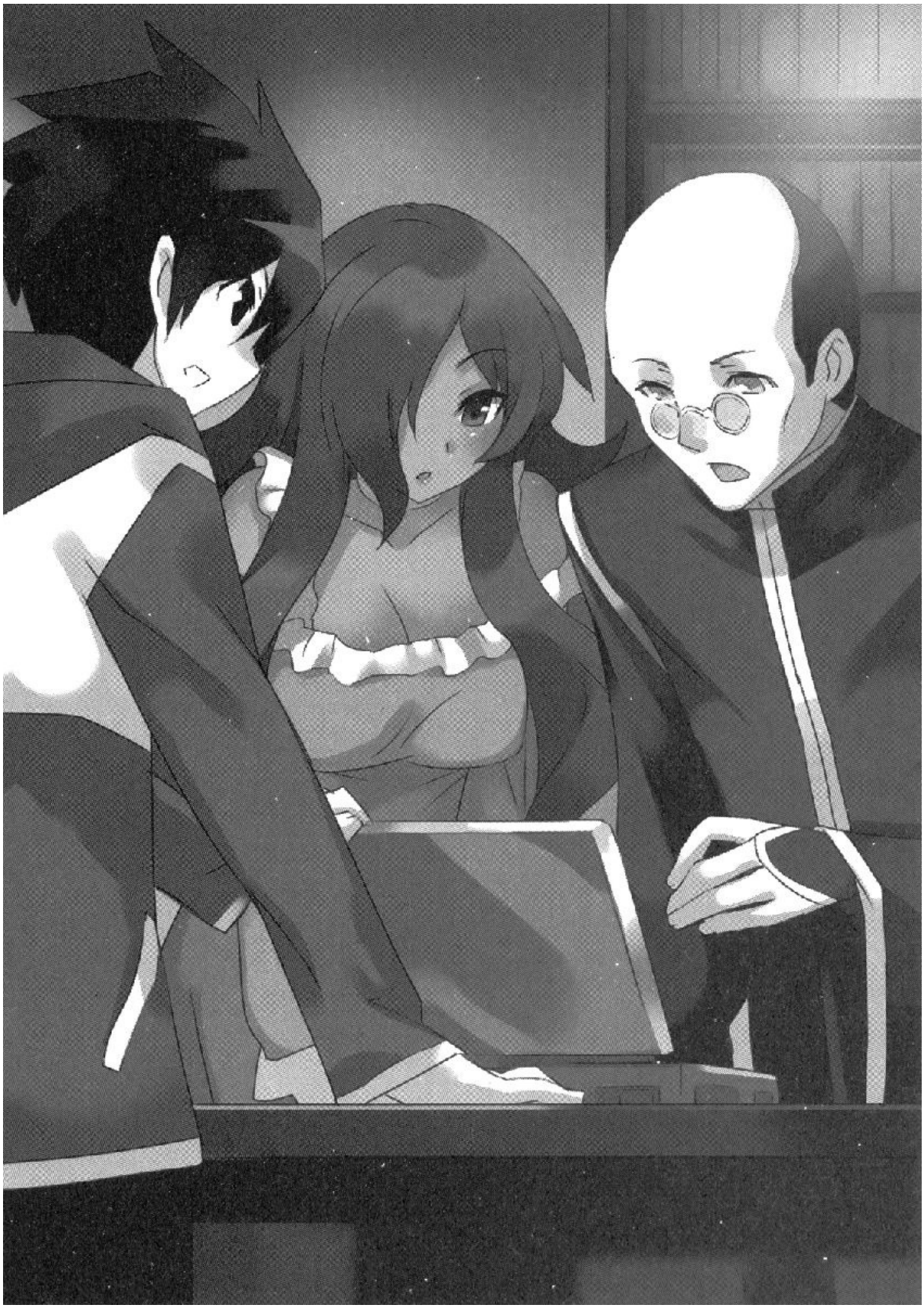
Kirche lifted her arms up and shrugged in confusion.

"We also call upon it in magic. It is the branch of 'lightning' spells."

"How strange. I had certainly thought of it as some sort of poison or what not."

"… there is a battery inside of it. Ah, what I mean by battery is something that stores electricity. Hmm, it seems to be completely empty."

"I do not really understand that part, but if there is no electricity, it will not be of any use."



Kirche fluttered around them.

“But, it may be of some use for research.”

Colbert nodded in agreement.

“Just being able to look at this collection of parts closely… makes my heart pound with excitement.”

Colbert continued looking at the notebook computer with the eyes of a child who had been given a present.

“The least I can do for now, is let you study it as you wish.”

Colbert looked at Saito worriedly.

“But… are you sure? I am certain to be absolutely careful with it, but I may end up destroying it. Is this not important to you?”

Saito shook his head.

“It’s ok. Either way, I can’t use it.”

Somehow cheerfully, Saito replied.

Colbert nodded and buried his face in the notebook computer again. He couldn’t stop himself from taking it apart and analyzing it now.

As Saito turned to leave, Kirche complained to him.

“Really, you’ve done an unnecessary thing. He’s going to be so busy studying it that after a week, he will forget all about me.”

Arriving back to his room, Saito looked around at the ridiculous scene. Tabitha and Siesta, who had somehow got herself drunk, were snoring away.

Louise was the only one who was still drinking wine. Looking up at the returned Saito, the words from her mouth slurred out.

“Wher diya go~~?”

“C-Colbert-sensei’s place. What the heck happened here…, you guys….”

Three empty wine bottles were laying on the floor, which surprised Saito.

“One fer each o’ us, we merrily drank. Wait, wassit merrily? Ahh, wha-ever.”

“You guys… really overdid it.”

It was rather strange for the normally, lightweight Louise to drink this much.

Louise yelled out in an irritated tone.

“…but, Shaito didn’t come back,” she mumbled out weakly.

Don’t tell me that she was waiting this whole time for me! Saito thought as Louise looked more and more cute to him.

“ShaitoShaitoShaito,” she yelled his name repeatedly.

“Wha’s wid Shaito…

“Ya reely shink is o-k to na go home?”

She asked whether it was ok for him not to go home. As she was drinking, Louise kept dwelling on the meaning of those words.

“Yea.”

“Whyy?”

“Because you’re here.”

“Riar.”

“I’m not lying. Whatever.”

“Wha er ya gonna do in da few-cha?”

The considerably drunk Louise bounced from topic to topic. As embarrassing as

it was, Saito thought that the drunken Louise wouldn't remember it anyways, so an incredible response came from his mouth.

"Marry Louise."

"Reely? Wid me? Reely?"

"Yea. I have to be responsible. You called me after all."

"I wanna hab two childden."

Louise continued to say unbelievable things.

"I, I guess."

"Yep, yep. I… hab a requessst."

Louise suddenly got up and held out her hand.

"What is it?"

As she tiredly talked in her drunken state to Saito, Louise jabbed him with her finger.

"I… wanna hab a bigga chest, so ya should exercise 'em."

"Huh?"

"Ya know, da dis and dat chest exercise."

The air got tense.

As Saito was petrified in confusion, Louise grabbed his hands.

"Like dis, they say it'll git bigga."

Louise was encouraging Saito's hands to rub her bosom.

"Lou-Louise…"

Saito did not know what the heck was going on anymore, as Louise whispered

into his ear.

“If dey git bigga, ya may like ‘em. But ya might like ‘em small instead. I’b bin worryin bout zat.”

As the moonlight hit them… all Saito could think about was Louise.

Louise drew close to Saito and started licking his cheek.

How cute she was right now. If this was what she was like drunk, then he wished she would stay drunk forever. He wanted to push her down so badly, but he couldn’t.

She was drunk after all. If he took advantage of her like this, he wouldn’t live it down. Ah, but it was so hard not to. *What should I do, ah, what should I do?* his mind screamed…

A shadow flew across the night sky.

At the same time, something twinkled under the moonlight.

Feeling the presence of danger, Saito instantly returned to normal.

“What the?”

He gently pushed Louise back onto the bed.

“Wass wid you, hab a problem wid me afta all?”

“Just go to sleep.”

Saito quickly reached for Derflinger on his back.

Edging his face out the window, he saw a nimble shadow gliding across the sky!

Something shining was heading straight towards him.

An ice arrow.

Noticing it coming at him, Saito quickly back-stepped away. The ice arrow shattered as it crashed into the wall.

The shadow glided around in the night sky…ntil finally, it lunged at Saito.

A gargoyle?

Dragon?

Whatever it was… there appeared to be a rider on it. The magic that was thrown at him… had to be this person.

Was it Gallia?

…or Myoznitnirn?

While he was pondering this, his battle-hardened body reacted instinctively. As it drew close, Saito jumped from the window, crashing into the shadow's rider.

As the rider cried in shock and tried to regain his balance, Saito pinned him down with Derflinger.

"Wait! Wait!"

The rider began crying loudly.

"Huh?"

Saito had heard that voice before.

"Please! Put down your sword! It's me! René! René Vonke!"

"René!"

The surprised Saito withdrew Derflinger. The face that was traced in the moonlight… was the dragon knight that Saito fought with in Albion. It was the plump face of René.

It was a very nostalgic face.

"Since it has been a long time, I thought that I would give you a surprise! But you got the drop on me instead. It was impressive how you managed to stop an army of 70,000 back in Albion! That was quite some feat!"

Dropping to the ground, the two of them gave each other a strong embrace.

“Not really. I haven’t seen you since we parted in Albion!”

“Since then, I’ve been assigned to the Dragon Knight Squadron that guards the capital. Every single day, it’s been tiresome patrols non-stop. It sucks.”

René looked up and down at Saito’s appearance with an amused expression.

“Huh…, I had heard that you became a Chevalier, but you don’t seem to be swimming in gold. You look the same as before. How much are you getting annually?”

“Five hundred ECU.”

“What, that’s better than me. Well, you’re an Imperial Guard after all. Anyways, you should at least buy some new clothes.”

“I bought… or rather I ended up buying a horse. Because of that, I’m broke.”

“What an expensive horse that was, huh?”

René said with a laugh. A forced laugh was Saito’s reply.

“Hey, come in. Let’s have a drink.”

As Saito said that, René shook his head.

“No, I didn’t really come to hang out. I have a duty. It is to hand you this letter and return as soon as that’s done. Since they are making a dragon knight do this, it can’t be any ordinary errand! We don’t exactly fly half-heartedly through the skies.”

“A letter?”

“Oh yeah. For the time being, allow me the formalities. In any case, it is official business after all.”

Saying this, René straighten up and acted like a soldier.

“Vice Commander of the Knights of Ondine, Saito Chevalier de Hiraga-dono!”

“Y-yes!”

Saito instinctively straightened up as well.

“From her Majesty the Queen, I present to you a handwritten letter! I advise you to take care of it!”

The Queen? Henrietta gave me a letter? What does this mean?

From the inside pocket of his coat, René took out an important looking envelope bearing a seal. Then, he gently handed it to Saito like it was made of glass.

“Th-thank you.”

“Please break the seal and follow the instructions contained inside.”

René said to Saito in a serious tone.

Saito nodded heavily and took out the letter inside.

Looking at what was written, Saito’s eyes started spinning.

Chapter 3: Aboard the Ostland

"This is an opportunity to recover our honor..."

Yelled Guiche as he ordered the members of the Water Spirit corps to line up.

"Uohhhhh!..." the ten boys raised a scream.

"Our honor has been injured by a sad incident... But God has not forgotten about us! Her Highness the queen has given us a chance to restore our honor!"

The troops cheered again.

Guiche urged Saito, who was already tired beyond his limit.

"Well then, Vice Captain, please tell everybody about this grand mission."

Two nights ago, Reynal had brought a direct order from Her Highness.

"Eh...erm.....eh.... today is a shiny day and the sun blesses us in this starting journey..."

"Forget about the formalities and tell us the queen's orders already!"

Guiche poked Saito, who was so nervous that he didn't know what to say, in the stomach.

"Well then. Mr. Guiche de Gramont and Mr. Saito Chevalier de Hiraga: Please escort Her Majesty the Princess's court lady, Miss Louise de La Valière, and magic academy student miss Tiffania Westwood to Romalia making use of the empire union force on the double."

"Listen! We are to protect these ladies even at the cost of our lives, understood?!"

Said Guiche in an imperative tone, and the members of the knight corps looking at the sky cried out loud overjoyed.

Leaning against the cabin wall and looking at them from afar were Louise, the person they were supposed to escort, Kirche, who came to the Ostland so she could be with Colbert, and the petite blue-haired girl, Tabitha.

"They tell you what to do but they don't tell you how..." said Kirche in a shocked voice.

"They wouldn't stand a chance without the Ostland, would they?"

The expedition to the east was planned by Mr. Colbert who had already brought the Ostland to the grounds of the Magic Academy.

Of course, it was already filled with wind stones. But even being told "immediately", Saito's party were short on means so they asked Mr. Colbert for help almost cryingly. But... even after Louise said this to Kirche, she looked kind of eager.

It would seem she was remembering something embarrassing and became nervous.

"Does something bother you, Louise?" asked Kirche, calling Louise back to her senses.

"Eh?.... erm?... what was it?"

"Tss! what are you daydreaming of... I was saying that really, this higher ups are spitting off orders as they feel like then throwing everything away, and the next thing you know you are cleaning their mess."

Louise tried with all of her might to give off a serious look,

"Wo-working over Her Majesty's expectations is my everything!"

Then strange sounds like "shushushushu" resounded behind Louise and the steam-based machine began to move.

"By the way, where is Colbert-sensei?" Louise asked Kirche.

"I don't remember seeing him when we took off."

This machine wasn't supposed to move without him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"Jean is having fun with the gift he got from Saito," said Kirche in an angry tone.

"A gift from Saito?"

"Yes, what was it? That 'noto pazo-con' or something? Just what does he find interesting about messing with that garbage I wonder."

Louise had seen it as well, it was the machine Saito brought from his world... Why in the world would Saito give it to Colbert-sensei?

And it came as a shock to her,

Can this be Saito's decision!? "I'm going to stay in this world, there is no need to stop somebody from the other world to search his way back."

"Saito..."

Her eyes turned red and she could not think of anything. In her eyes, Saito's shape appeared.

"Ah. I get the feeling that I said some cruel things when I was drunk last night."

Good... Good. It's good isn't it? She should do something in return for Saito.
...And as she was thinking this, Kirche put a disappointed face and raised her hands, seeing Louise's state she could not say whatever she wanted, thought Kirche.

"Geez, this girl is pitiful, her mood goes up and down every now and then, you sure are getting it hard."

Louise answered coldly,

"It's Her Majesty orders, they aren't hard."

"Didn't you want to go to the east? Jean was disappointed, 'Ahhh, I thought that at last I was going to the east', I think that's why he is really interested in Saito's

present. But you said it yourself, that you wanted to find him a way home."

"Yes, I guess..." said Louise with crossed feelings.

"Even then I don't see you very disappointed, is there a reason?" said Kirche with a smile on her lips as she looked at Louise's face.

"Thats not true, I.. am very disappointed!" said Louise with a mad face.

"Eeeh, are you?" she continued teasing Louise. "To me it looked like 'with this I get Saito to stay by my side,' or something like that."

Louise turned away her deep red face and Kirche looked at her over the shoulder.

"Oh my, bullseye?"

"I, I'm just ship-sick!"

Yelled Louise as she headed towards her cabin. As soon as she confined herself on the cabin that was prepared for them she laid herself down in the bed, slapped her face on the bed and exhaustedly stretched her body.

"Ha..." Louise sighed

"I am... I am a coward, I want to hold on to Saito, I don't want him to go anywhere. Even if it's his home."

That time when he said as a joke he was going to search for a way back, I tried to stop him without a second thought. "How selfish," Louise scolded herself.

When starting to think like this, she resolved,

"Tell him about my feelings in the last minute so his feelings for me don't turn into a ball and chain."

Even saying this, it starts to seem to me like a pathetic excuse. In the end isn't it that I just don't have enough courage?

I'm just a coward.

Thinking this she felt ashamed and at some point tears started to come out.

Being in this mood the door suddenly opened and Saito appeared before her,

"It looked like you were quarreling with Kirche, is there something wrong?"

Louise pulled the blanket over to her face,

"Wha... what is it?!"

Saito sighed as he sat sorrowfully beside Louise... but Louise didn't move a single inch.

"Damn! For a strong-minded girl like you to be such a weakling..." whined Saito. *Probably Kirche said something to depress her again, no doubt about it.*

"Sheshhh! This girl would be helpless if it weren't for me," said Saito trying to sound high-and-mighty.

Probably I am the only one able to help, reassure and encourage her. And thats because she is so damn selfish, anyone would have given up by now.

Which means she will be no good without me. Maybe she'd die if I weren't here? thought Saito, who did not know about Louise trying to jump from the fire tower.

"Louuuiseee.... c'mon cheer up!..... Mm, eh? Louise?" peeling the blankets showed a red-eyed Louise.

"What the!... Why are you crying!?"

"Saito..... Is it OK? Really? Really for real? Is it OK even if you don't go back?" asked a sobbing Louise.

Saito smiled kindly as she peeked over the sheets.

"It's all right, I mean, I've got good friends and comrades here so, I don't feel very lonely. Even that Guiche said to me 'if you have nowhere to go, come to my home.' I don't know how reliable his statement is, but the feeling alone is alright for me."

Because of those words Louise suddenly remembered her family. She always thought about her father and mother being just annoying. But that was a mistake.

By punishing her themselves, they hoped for the country to forgive her crime of desertion and infiltration of a foreign country. Father said that time,

"If you say you are going to use Louise as a war dog I am going to stand against the government as an enemy."

And Cattleya that will wrap me in a benevolent smile.

I'm sure even Éléonore loves me. If I were to not see them again I would not be able to take it.

"No, please do not say that. I am sure Saito's father and mother are, too..."

"It's alright," said Saito laughing.

"Are you really sure?" said Louise with a very sorrowful face. "You might never be able to meet your father and mother again."

Saito thought that Louise blamed herself for bringing him to this world.

He felt sorry about her always worrying about this, because she even wept about it. Therefore he made the decision to lie to her.

"Truth is I have no family."

"Eh?!"

Louise remembered the letter Cattleya sent her, there she wrote that Saito wept like a child on her lap remembering his birthplace.

"Lies, that's a big fat lie. it was on Chii's letter that you cried when remembering your place."

"Ah, ehm, nn, well that's, how do I say it, true I thought about my home, and it made me cry but, its not like I cried because of my family, also true I had friends, there were relatives as well but there were no family."

Saito tried to make it sound as truthful as he could. He didn't want to hurt Louise

anymore over something he could not do anything to fix.

"Really, really for real?"

"Yeah, why would I lie, you sure are a strange one."

Even that visible lie from Saito totally fooled Louise. That feeling to not hurt Louise anymore was so serious that it made her believe in Saito's words.

"Is that so? I'm sorry, I said some weird things."

"T's all right," said Saito gently laughing. "So to speak I have no family there but here I do have. I mean you Louise."

"Me!?"

"Yes, master and servant are in some way a relationship that surpass family, isn't it?" this words made Louise deep red even to her ears.

"Are you trying to say my existence makes up for your father and your mother? Is that it?"

"Guess I don't know but, how do I say it, its like the sole existence of your loved one makes things different. I feel like it makes up for any and every thing else," said Saito in a very serious fashion.

Indeed so serious that it almost made Louise faint away. Slowly approaching Saito, Louise's eyes started to close numbly.

Ahhh! Ahhh, the happiness, if we were to say that it has a shape and a concrete form it would have to be these kind of moments, I'm sure of it.

Louise tenderly held his face with both of her hands and kissed his lips. Their lips met and their tongues began to move. Only the sound of their kissing could be heard in the room, or at least it should had.

PARARI.

"Hnn?"

PARARI.

"!?"

It came to Louise's ears, a sound different to their lips moving and without thinking she opened her eyes.

PARARI.

She faced in the direction of the sound and found a blue haired girl sitting in the bed besides them turning around pages of a book.

Saito faced that direction as well.

"What are you doing Tabatha?"

"Body guard."

Louise's face turned red up to her bones.

"Bo, body guard she says... te... choose when and where!!" next thing she heard was some kind of gossiping behind the opening of door.

"What, you want something?"

"Incredible, they didn't even notice Tabatha was there..." Louise heard Kirche and the members of the Water Spirit corps voices and instantly hid inside the sheets. Saito moved his head slowly.

The members of the Water Spirit's went so far as to take down the door! And tramped inside the room. Guiche was so amused that he started impersonating Saito.

"Its like the sole existence of your loved one makes things different. I feel like it makes up for any and every thing else."

After that Guiche held his belly and laughed loudly, "Those are the most cliché words I have ever heard, you dumb!"

Somehow out of the hoop Malicorne gave out some too, and started to imitate Louise's movements,

"Nooooh, Saito... Louise, Louise, just leaked down belowww …" up for the

moment Guiche followed and held Malicorne's body as he whispered in his ear.

"It's ok because, you know, I will still hold you, Louise."

"Saitooo, Saitoo, aahhn, hold me forever with your sweet wo....." Malicorne couldn't end the phrase.

Louise, in a fit of rage, used Explosion to blast those unruly guys out along with the wall.

But even then, her anger didn't diminish the least bit, so, for the time being, she profusely smashed a near-standing Saito

"Idiot!Idiot,idiot! I don't know! Don't know you anymore!"

It was a peaceful exchange, but now the remnants of the "void" were still fresh. The moans of the foolish guys still echoed around the place, and the water elemental force people that gathered were breathless because of the destructive force of violence before them, but even before this war-zone, Tabatha was still peacefully changing her book pages.

Louise and Saito ended up spending the time till Romalia in a cabin with no walls.

At night, even after everyone went to sleep, Louise struggled inside her bed to sleep; The words Saito spoke that day made her so happy she could not help it, and *that very* Saito was sleeping like a log right beside her. Speaking of which, for some time now it had become very natural to sleep in the same bed. She tried to get near his lips but suddenly changed her mind; past Montmorency and Kirche advice caught her mind,

"If you forgive men, they become cheaters," or so she heard. In other words, men want to gather women as if they were part of a collection.

There are women like that too; women like Kirche for example.

Anyways, that forgiving and conveying feelings equals a weakness. This familiar, the moment he conveyed his feelings, he probably thought triumphantly "Yay! Took down Louise!" and was all happy and over himself I guess.

Besides that, I can't believe my own lack of modesty! Louise thought to herself as she lightly slapped her own head. *Probably I'm just not used to this endearment; I mean, I'm so weak to love mood. Just a little "I love you" here and there, and then everything does not mean a damn. God, this isn't a joke!* she scolded herself as she reflected on her own conduct. *I'm not giving in that easily, not until marriage... Nonono, even after marriage I'm not giving in before three months..... maybe I should make it just one month? Anyway, putting that aside, let's try to be more gentle with Saito. Let's try not getting angry about every little thing. I'll even try to overlook a little. After all, he is a boy. Well, I will even forgive him for a little cheating. But, am I capable of that, this me?* and after a little self-analyzing time she stopped worrying.

Well, I guess it's alright if I do it little by little. After that, Henrietta came to her mind, *Just why did she call us? Is something starting again? After every thing comes to an end, at that time I will convey my feelings,* she thought. Strangely, when she thought like that it felt like it did not matter how strong an enemy will be, or how hard times might get, she still could try harder. And as she was satisfied with how far she got that night she went to sleep.

Meanwhile, in a little far away cabin, an inhuman-breasted Tifa was spending a sleepless night. The "Ostland" was designed for long term trips, and the large number of cabins was expected of Kirche's household. It was a small but solid interior. Beds were just as fluffy in every cabin.

After coming out from the Albion woods, this bed was the first thing she liked. It was totally different from the futon she was used to.

Softly, the body started to sink in the bed, *Halkeginia has some dreadful things, but at least this bed deserves some price.* She thought.

Normally I fall asleep the instant I lay down on the bed, but today is different she thought while pulling her own long ears. It was only a month and a little after coming out from Albion, but she was traveling again. This time, the destination was the headquarters of religion-- Romalia. Without knowing the reason she was ordered to get ready for the trip, and before long she was already inside the ship. *Will it be alright? Elven blood flows inside me and we are going to the home town of St. Brimir religion; if my identity were to be found in a place like that it would become a commotion.*

She closed her eyes but could not sleep, *Saito had said, 'It's alright, we are coming with you and I won't let anything happen to you,' but am I really gonna be alright?* Not being able to sleep, she slowly got out from her bed and then from her room she headed to the deck. The Ostland moved by the means of a steam based machine making this particular "shushushu" as it moved around the sky. She walked close to the edge and, looking down, she noticed a dark cloud spreading. As if she was gazing upon a dark sea she began to shiver.

The Ostland was a fast ship which made the wind beat strong on her face, and as she thought of the incoming events her heart couldn't be put to rest. Tiffania remembered the children in the orphanage. *Those children should be giving their all. I too must give my all. Whatever my destiny may be, I probably won't be leading a normal life anymore. I was already prepared for this when I left Westwood village. I wanted to see all kinds of things;*

I'm sure my incoming experiences should show me the way I must follow. Anyways, I am not going to lose to doubts before even starting.

Tiffania focused her energy and moved away as if she was dismissing the black clouds.

Chapter 4: The Two Knight Corps

Three days after setting sail from Tristain, the "Ostland" arrived at Romalia's southern port, Cittadella. It was indeed very fast. Even with a fully extended sail on a high speed, cargo-less ship, the distance by sea would take a week.

Cittadella was a fortress city constructed next to a big lake. It was convenient for ships to land and set sail, so the lake naturally became a port. Various ships were brought to the many piers that stretched along the shore. Purely from looking out towards the sea, the port had an appearance not unlike a typical rest stop for ships.

Well, when an oddly shaped ship such as the Ostland docked... a crowd gathered all around the pier. Saito and the crew were a little troubled from this.

Their arrival at Romalia was not an official visit.

In order to not attract the attention of Gallia, their arrival was officially an "academy field trip" by name. Of course, their real purpose was to covertly head for Henrietta's location, but that was a secret.

Naturally, their arrival created quite a memorable ruckus for officials.

On the pier, a spectacled person with the dull appearance of an important Romalian official eyed the Tristainian government-issued port documents, and then he stared at the Ostland suspiciously.

"Students of the Tristain Academy of Magic? What an incredible ship you're riding on. What's with this ship?"

Unlike normal, everyday ships used in Halkeginia, the Ostland had a large wingspan. Not only that, but on the tail and each wing of the ship was a large propeller unfamiliar to most. Official or not, anyone would think that it was suspicious.

The acting leader, Instructor Colbert, responded innocently.

"Ah, it is a new model of ship that I developed in Germania."

"On top of the wings, what are those strange bladed turrets?"

With an arrogant attitude, the official pointed his wand at it and inquired.

"Through the power of steam, it is a device that provides propulsion. I called it the 'water steam engine'."

The official narrowed his eyes at that point.

"Without using the blessed magic of God, you dare to fly in the sky with this strange device...is this not heresy?"

At the words of 'heresy,' the officials' aides sprang into action. All of them drew the holy items from around their neck; their hands trembled at the ready. All of Romalia's officials were clergymen after all.

The conversation was making Tiffania uneasy.

In order to hide her mixed elf blood, she was wearing a wide-brimmed hat, which she now pulled over her head more.

This action apparently caught the eye of the official.

"Hey you. Let me see that hat."

Tiffania was trembling awkwardly.

"What's wrong? I said let me see that hat. Did you not hear me?"

As the official reached for the hat, Tabitha softly chanted a spell. Seeing that motion, Kirche brazenly clung onto the officials arms.

"Ah! From close-up, I see that you're quite the man!"

"Wh-what are you doing?!"

"You do such a fabulous job, don't you, Mr. Wonderful Clergyman?"

"Not really..., anyways let me go! Stop trying to corrupt me!"

"There are a lot of things in this world that are more fun than praying to your god, you know?"

As all eyes gathered at their exchange..., the battle-experienced Tabitha completed her spell with the slightest of motions. Tiffania's hat started to glow.

With that, Kirche abruptly released the man.

"I guess it's as Mr. Official says. I may have come on too strongly."

The official cleared his throat and once again turned towards Tiffania.

"The hat, please."

Finally giving in, Tiffania handed over her hat.

"Hmm...you're much prettier without the hat."

'Huh', Tiffania thought as she checked her ears. Somehow they were that of a normal human being! The shocked Tiffania looked to the side at Tabitha. Somehow, this little blue-haired girl had helped her out with a spell.

Unbeknownst to Tiffania, the spell "Face Change" that could change appearances was a high-level square spell. At some point, Tabitha had apparently reached the capability of a square class mage.

In any case, nothing seemed to be out of place with the port documents. (Of course, since it was genuinely issued by the Tristainian government.) Since everything was in order, the official had no further inquiries.

A heavy weight collectively lifted off of their chests.

It was sort of ironic that they managed to get away by the skin of their teeth. Little did they know, they were inching towards disaster.

Leaving Cittadella by horse-drawn carriage, it would take a day to finally arrive at the capital of Romalia.

According to this country's customs, wands and weapons had to be stowed away in their baggage before arriving at the city gates.

Such a rule had passed over the head of Saito, who carelessly crossed the gate with Derflinger still on his back. Of course, this caused one of the guards to stop them.

"Hey, you over there!"

'Huh?,' Saito openly thought, as the guard shuffled over and put his hand on Derflinger.

"What kind of backwater town are you from?! I cannot forgive anyone who openly carries a weapon in this city!"

The bearer of the sword appeared to be a commoner, thought the guard. With a pompous attitude, the guard grabbed Derflinger off Saito's back and threw it on the ground.

"Wh-what the hell are you doing?!"

Just then, the guard noticed Saito's mantle.

"What the hell? Are you a noble? Still, what is the big idea walking by us carrying a sword? What is with the northern countries that commoners are allowed to prance around acting like nobles? This is blasphemous to God!"

Saito started to voice his complaint, but Derflinger popped out of its scabbard and beat him to it.

"Hey! What's the deal with throwing a person – no, a sword onto the ground!"

"What is this, an intelligent sword? Whatever the reason, carrying it is not allowed. You should put it in your bag or load it on your horse…in any case, get over here. You look suspicious."

Still, Derflinger continued bombarding the guards.

"Shut up, you dolts! Guarding your cursed house of frothy prayers!"

“…house of frothy prayers, you say?”

‘Oh boy, Saito thought, holding his head. Sorry from the extra trouble caused, Saito hurriedly grabbed Derflinger to shut him up. The fuming sword clattered about, making it quite difficult to keep it in the scabbard. As Saito finally pinned it inside the scabbard, it seemed to finally cool down a bit.

“Hey, how many times have I told you! Instead of being so offensive, you really should come up with nicer ways of naming things.”

“…how dare this sword! Insulting Romalia’s guards equates to insulting God and Founder Brimir!”

“Can it, greenhorn. What do you claim to know about Brimir? You’d best be quick to apologize and then run along to chant your prayers.”

With cries of ‘What!’ and ‘Unforgivable!’, the guards grabbed the hilt of Derflinger.

“Hey, what are you doing!”

Saito rushed to stop them.

“Demon! Time to turn you into a lump of smoldering iron!”

“Interesting! Let’s see you try it!”

“Stop it!”

It had turned into a scuffle. Louise and the others watched over it with a dazed expression. Because of some unnecessary words, the resulting scuffle turned into a very bad situation, they decided.

But, it seemed like they were destined for trouble anyways. Saito had unfortunately flung the vigorous guards away.

“Wah! I’m sorry!”

“You think sorry is going to cut it?! You have just used force on the servants of God and the Founder! We shall halt this blasphemy here! …Men! Come out and

stop these suspicious individuals!”

At those words, many guards flooded out of a small area.

“Blasphemy!”

“This may be related to the incident! Seize them!”

Their hands grasped at their holy items. Seeing their holy wands, Kirche said,

“Uh oh. These guys are Paladins.”

Tabitha responded to her words.

Blowing a whistle, Sylphid dropped down from the sky. Tabitha and Kirche jumped on its back. Tabitha then cast ‘Levitation’ on the panicky, confused Tiffania, lifting her onto Sylphid’s back.

Only Louise was left standing in front of the Paladins.

“What is this!?”

Louise ruffled her pink hair and shouted directly at the Paladins.

“We are the Tristainian government! Currently, we are heading towards Her Majesty, Queen Henrietta, who is staying in this country! Laying a hand on us will be a significant breach of diplomacy! Do you understand?”

The Paladins looked at each other.

“…Her Majesty, Queen Henrietta?”

“Did you not receive this information?”

‘Uh oh.’ Louise thought as her face paled. Come to think of it, Henrietta’s visit had been undercover. Although the upper echelon of the government may have known, there were many of the lower-ranked guards that wouldn’t know.

“Bastards…, going as far as using the name of the queen of Tristain…, this is looking more and more suspicious.”

“You have done plenty to invoke the judgment of the church. Prepare yourselves!”

Kirche picked up the panicking Louise into her arms.

“Jean, Guiche, everyone, you guys follow us with ‘Fly’. Saito! Come here and hop on!”

Grasping tightly onto Derflinger, Saito jumped towards the ascending Sylphid. Springing through the air, he skillfully caught Sylphid’s leg.

Letting out a short cry, Sylphid accelerated upwards. Colbert and the rest of the Knights of the Ondine quickly cast ‘Fly”, chasing after Sylphid.

“The heretics are escaping! After them!”

From the small building, horses quickly emerged, sprouting wings as they flew up. The Paladins mounted the horses and chased after Saito and the others, who had just raised their heresy level with further blasphemy.

Looking at the horses, Louise shouted.

“It’s Pegasi!”

Native to the area of Romalia, the winged, holy horse, Pegasus, was the steed of the Paladin. Glimmering with radiant white light, they steadily drew closer and closer.

Normally, the flying speed of a Pegasus was comparable to that of a wind dragon…, but Sylphid wasn’t escaping at full speed.

“The ones using the ‘Fly’ spell can’t escape at this rate…”

Catching Kirche’s words, Saito drew close to her.

“Hey, Kirche! How are we going to get away?! We’ve got ourselves into a lot of unnecessary trouble!”

Kirche brushed her hair up and glared at the ‘one who started it’.

“Don’t you know how frightening the ‘Paladin’ are? That if they decide that

someone is ‘blasphemous’, it is not a trivial thing? They can informally conduct the judgment of the church and cut down anyone they see fit.”

The color drained from Saito’s face.

He was reminded of a ruckus between himself and Beatrice. Looking backwards, Tiffania was trembling. Most likely because of hearing the words "judgment of the church", it refreshed her memory of the ruckus caused by her ears a little while ago.

Viewing the streets of Romalia from sky high, it seemed to be divided into strict districts like a checkerboard. No matter whichever district it was, a beautifully carved tower stood ever so proudly over the heads of other buildings.

"Seriously, insulting the clergymen in this place full of churches is the last thing you would ever want to do. At least consider about it throughoutly before doing so."

Hearing Kirche say so, Saito stared at the Derflinger in his hands

"Oi, you big mouthed sword. Go and reflect yourself"

Derflinger replied unwillingly

"It's not fair, all the time sitting in the sheath has made me very agitated. But most important of all is that I hate this country. The man who founded this country named Forsythe, I abhor him!"

"These ancient things just forget it! Because of you, you've already caused me enough trouble already!"

Hearing Saito's scolding, Derflinger returned into the scabbard, slightly chattering, as if it really was reflecting on itself.

Looking backwards at the Ondine Knights, they were almost flying erratically, like an airplane in turbulence. They were tired. The "flying" spell wasn't designed for long distance journeys, since it required great concentration.

"At their limit"

Kirche described calmly. Tabitha below raised her staff and pointed to somewhere.

"Tavern"

Kirche nodded her head. Understanding Tabitha's intention, Sylphid started diving.

"W-what are you thinking! Why should we ever land!"

"To use that bar as a defense"

"Defense?!"

Louise and Saito roared in unison.

"You give me another choice, genius. We can't escape any longer, being caught is the last thing you'd ever want. If this goes on, a fight is going to break out anyhow. Better do it in a tavern since there's usually no one at daytime."

Sylphid accurately arrived at the targeted street. The pedestrians were so surprised at the sudden Wind dragon, they all fled. Kirche jumped off Sylphid, and kicked open the tavern's door.

Unwary of the trouble about to be bestowed on him, the bar owner welcomed them with a warm smile and a "How may I serve you". Kirche took a rough glance inside the inn. As expected, there were not many customers to speak of. Only a man dressed like a clergyman sat with bartender.

It's common sense in Romalia not to drink wine in broad daylight, who would otherwise be treated as non-believers. Even if anyone wanted to, they would have done it in secrecy at home. Kirche relaxed. The less involved, the better.

"What would you like to order, miss"

Seeing noble customers, the owner of the inn came and asked, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Today, I'll take this inn."

"Eh?"

The dumbfounded shopkeeper looked at the unending line of nobles walking in, so shocked that his eyes could have dropped out.

"What, What is this?"

Kirche did not answer, she was scratching over a check with a pen, and placed it in the hands of the owner.

"That, that much!"

"It may not be enough, when the time comes, don't hesitate to ask for more"

"Ye-Yes! Although, what are you planning to do? Is it a party?"

"More or less, although the fireworks would go a bit wild, I hope you wouldn't mind, would you?"

Fireworks?

The owner turned around. Tabitha was instructing the Ondine Knights how to make a fortress out of chairs and tables.

"Whoa! Wait, wait! You people! What is this! Waa!"

The shopkeeper's complaints were drowned by the sound of windows shattering. The guards outside were already in formation and casting spells.

"Uwha! What's going on! What is this! Ah, holy knights!"

As soon as the shopkeeper saw the pure white cape stitched with a holy cross, he legs turned jelly.

"You, You, who are you!"

Kirche pitied the poor guy

"Get down. It's dangerous"

Saito dragged Tiffania, trembling like never before, into the tavern and let her sit

down. Tiffania hugged herself as if attempting to use the academy's dress and her large breasts to conceal herself, sitting down in a corner still like a statue.

"Saito"

"It's going to be alright. No matter what happens I will protect you. Besides, it seems like I'm at fault as well, so sorry."

Tiffania nodded her head, still shaking. Saito put his hand on Derflinger. Outside of the shattered windows, a solemn line of Holy Knights stood proudly.

The Ondine Water Spirit knights made a cover under the windows using chairs and tables, standing off with their wands. Tabitha and Kirche made commands lacking details. They had already turned into something like a commander and vice-commander.

The only customer here, they offered him to leave due to obvious reasons, but to everyone's surprise, he turned down that offer with a smile.

"There's no food better than this" and drank down the red wine in one gulp.

Colbert silently observed the Holy Knights' actions from a crack through a table. Normally, he would be the one trying to stop this brutal fight, but this time he didn't mention a single complaint to Kirche. Saito, observing Colbert transitioning from being calm to being realistic in this situation, concluded that it may be a brutal fight, but is the correct decision.

In comparison, Guiche, Captain of Ondine Knights, kept mumbling "How did it turn into this" and knelt on the floor covering his head like an ostrich.

Louise's body seemed to shake with fury over something. It wouldn't matter what words were used to comfort her. Louise with an extremely high dignity just can't stand an insult through being mistaken and treated like a criminal.

Saito huffed and puffed, taking a break next to Kirche and Tabitha.

"Now what?"

Kirche laughed

"Alright! Every one of the brave knights here, Let me describe the plan today"

Everyone held their breaths, waiting anxiously for Kirche to name their position and objective.

"Try and stall as much time as possible"

"That-That's it?"

Kirche nodded.

"Right. As long as we buy time here, the news of a riot will be delievered to the Pope eventually. Do you think Queen Henrietta wouldn't have noticed by then?"

"Wow, how much patience do we need"

Guiche voiced his thoughts, stunned.

"Is that so? You could always go outside and surrender to the Knight's trial, you know. We are all guilty of insulting an official. I wouldn't want to be taken and be beheaded or whatever."

Saito, then said with determination.

"Me and Derflinger are the only ones who insulted them. I'll go alone."

"Saito!"

Louise cried running towards Saito.

"Don't! If you're going, I'm coming with you"

She bowed her head with embarrassment.

"You are my familiar. Your responsibility is also mine. Therefore I'm also going with you"

Saito looked at Louise emotionally.

"Louise"

Louise blushed.

"A-as a master, I have my responsibilities. That's why, I won't allow you to go."

"I won't"

Grateful to the core, Saito hugged Louise. Letting herself drown in this emotional conversation, Louise also hugged him back red-faced.

"Be-because master and a familiar are together as one."

"I understand. I understand."

"Hey, do these things somewhere else."

Malicorne frowning so hard that he looked as if he was 50 years older pulled them apart. The two just now tightly embracing each other were red to the core.

Kirche complained

"No matter what you said, it just won't work."

"Also, if we let you go out by yourself, it would hurt our reputation, wouldn't it?"

Malicorne flicked his thumb up with a snap. Malicorne's words seemed to be an infection to the other Ondine Knights, all saying "That's right, that's right!"

"Basically, I hate Romalian clerks."

"The Crusaders are cruel and only knows how to brag! I've already wanted them to get a taste of who is the real hero around for a long time!"

These dangerous words echoed throughout the tavern. Looks like it really came from the bottom of their hearts.

Whatever they say, nobles of Halkeginia just love getting involved in these conflicts. Saito shook his head shrugging.

"Huh. What's with whoever's God. Since ancient times, isn't it because of God's existence we've been having all these wars?"

Thinking of the Histories lessons he'd been in, Saito said.

Different religions, because of just this reason, have caused countless battles on Earth. However, as everyone was saying while being full of themselves, nobody heard Saito's monologue.

That is, except for one person.

It's the sole customer sitting calmly in a chair despite all the commotion. That hat on his head was wide and low, covering his face. After hearing Saito's claim, he laughed, then used a pelicular voice and spoke

"That was really some interesting things you've said"

"Is that so? Well, it's going to be really dangerous here soon, so it would be better if you leave. Sorry to cause you all the trouble!"

"Nah, let me stay and watch"

What a peculiar person, but now was not the time to think about this.

Saito looked outside again behind the crudely made defense.

"Hmm, those guys still haven't attacked so far"

Kirche observed. Since the Crusaders have broken the windows, they didn't move an inch at all. Looks like they only broke the windows to understand the situation inside.

Another few moments of standing off each other passed. A crusader walked out from the surrounding formation. His expression was incredibly irritating to anyone who saw it, and shook his head two or three times, as if disgusted with the whole incident. While he walked, Saito voiced his thoughts.

"He looks like Guiche in some way."

"Please don't compare me with him."

The gentle man, who looked like a bishounen, had a head of long dark hair. His black hair spilt cleanly into left and right straight down from his forehead,

dangling on both sides.

The man gave a polite bow and called out softly to the people taking defensive actions inside the inn.

"I am the captain of the Crusaders representing Alieste monastery, Carlo Christiano Trompontino. To everyone one within the tavern, you have been completely surrounded. Being the humble servants of God and our Ancestors, I dislike pointless battles. Therefore, are you willing to honestly surrender?"

"We will gladly do so if you can ensure our safety."

Kirche bargained.

"Despite I really want to do so, but right now we are handling another case and has accepted an order to arrest every suspicious person and put them up for trial. If you can prove your innocence to God, we can discuss further details."

The Ondine Water Spirit Knights yelled out loudly, complaining. They knew thoroughly the so called trial is just an abbreviation for your sentence for your "crimes".

"We are not heretics!"

"Real nobles from Tristain!"

"If you are nobles from Tristain, then accept your trial like a noble. There is nothing wrong with using your body to prove your innocence. If you can't do that, then we have no choice but to treat you like one."

"Go ask his holiness the Pope! We're Romalian guests!"

Hearing Saito's raged yells, the Crusader named Carlo laid out his hands in a carefree way. A man looking like he would be of rank vice-captain came forward and whispered something in his ears.

"Since you are so stubborn about standing down, looks like we must trial you no matter what. How unfortunate, to bleed unnecessary blood today, to cast unnecessary magic. Ho ho, perhaps this is a training given from God."

Carlo lifted the holy cross hanging from his chest and magically stuck it to his forehead. With that done, his beautiful and gentle face turned into one with a strong scent of fierce cruelty.

"Crusaders! As believers and servants of God and Founder Brimir, eliminate the heretics!"

Magic thickened around the crusaders.

Carlo stood with his back facing Saito and the others. Exactly like a conductor of an orchestra of spells.

The environment inside the tavern was very tense.

Tabitha displayed her side of anxiety, one rarely seen, and gave specific orders to the Ondine Knights.

"Expand Air Shields. The more the better. Now."

Without hesitation, the Ondine Water Spirit Knights chanted spells, creating air shields in front of the tavern.

At the same time, the Crusaders have finished their spells.

Each of them held their respective wands out. Dragons in scales of flames slithered out from the tip of their wands, entangling together multiple times, and took shape as one giant single dragon.

"What is that!"

"Chorus of Praise. The spell Crusaders are most adapt in. Tricky"

Tabitha replied.

One time, Henrietta and the corpse of Prince Wales made a hexagonal star combination spell. This was very similar in make, only those who can endure vomiting blood and have gone under tough training, like the Crusaders here, were able to perform this miracle like spell.

"They're really trying to shoot that into the shop!"

Before Saito even ended his yells, the dragon on flames have already began its assault on the tavern.

Everyone inside the inn curled up fearfully.

A fortunate thing was that the dozen layers of air shields lived up to their purposes, diminishing the power of the flaming dragon. Still, the Ondine Knights expanded a few more air shields in front, like the saying, it never hurts to do more than less.

Of course, the one who eventually killed the creature was Tabitha. Standing up swiftly, she unleased a spell chanted already in preparation.

Glittering ice particles started to orbit around Tabitha, releasing a blinding lime light.

Ice storm.

Tabitha's ice storm enwrapped the fiery dragon.

All the people around couldn't care less about the steam generated. When the mist disappeared, seeing Tabitha still standing there heroically, every single soul in the Tavern cheered.

To their disappointment, Tabitha then said

"Out of energy. Take care of the rest"

Then went to the back in the inn.

Gulp. The Ondine Water Spirit Knights couldn't help but swallow their own saliva. Tabitha's powerful magic cannot be used anymore, which would, in other words, mean that they have to get through this on their own.

Unexpectedly getting their magic disintegrated, the faces of the Crusaders changed.

"Hmm, even in the standards of heretics, they are doing pretty good."

Carlo casted his next spell smiling.

Since a spell in the fire field was easily defeated, the next spell would be of water type. As the chant continued, the ice arrows began to increase.

And, the defense used respectively for the couple hundred ice arrows was nothing else other than Colbert's fire magic.

“Ur Kaun Jera Tir Gyfu”

No difference from his average attire from giving a lecture, Colbert calmly sang out magic, generating a fire snake comparable to the size of the now evaporated fire dragon.

As sudden as anyone would be seeing a flaming snake swallowing arrows of ice, it vanished. Only a few left out arrows punctured the table deep. With that, the Crusader's attack have ended.

But, Colbert also looked like he would be unable to cast anymore spells for quite a while. Scratching his balding head,

"Everyone, I'll leave the next spell to you guys" and went to the back of the inn as well.

On the streets a bunch of people had already gathered jeering and cheering. Obviously, seeing the bossy Crusaders, usually threatening people in "the name of the Pope", in trouble was something you just couldn't miss.

Huh! Carlo twisted his face.

"Huhhuh, damn, second time"

The next was going to be even more powerful, the students whispered to each other.

Saito tapped Louise's shoulders.

"It's time, Louise."

Kirche, Tabitha and Colbert all turned towards Louise. They all knew that Louise was the legendary void user.

The ace of everyone here …, “Void”.

A magic only the Founder could use, of type zero.

Though the Ondine Knights did not know of Louise's background, they knew of the potential lethal damages she was capable of. Which explained why they all glanced at Louise expecting something from her.

"Please blow all those guys away! Until then, we will defend this place with our lives!"

The next spell the Crusaders were chanting was of wind magic.

Whishhhhhhhhh!

The erratic gust might not be as powerful as the hexagonal star combination, but the power it contained should not be neglected either.

"I'll block it!"

Saito ran forward carrying Derflinger. The harsh gust of wind was being absorbed into Derflinger. Saito then turned back and yelled

"Louise! Now! Blow those guys away!"

Louise chanted the spell tensely.

Done.

Waving her wand, the explosion went off.

Pang! Accompanying the harmless pop, the blast only dented the ground in front of the Crusaders a little bit inwards.

"That's it?" Saito thought, his brain taking a break from blocking the fierce winds.

Louise also looked stunned at the damage done by her spell.

"How, how..."

Kirche nodded her head heavily.

"Ahh, I take that you're feeling very happy right now?"

A shudder was sent down Louise's spine.

"The way your system works is by conserving a lot of energy, no? Must need some emotions like anger or jealousy or whatever, but recently you haven't been going through much of either, have you?"

"D-d-did not, that kind of thing."

Louise twisted around hung her head embarrassed. Saito who started to be unable to withstand the fierce winds bumped onto her.

"Uwaaaa!"

Saito and Louise flew backwards inside the tavern. Though Derflinger may have absorbed a lot of the wind, it was still more than enough to damage the defenses constructed from tables and chairs.

As soon as the Crusaders confirmed the destruction of the defenses inside, instead of garrisoning like before, they raised the staffs in their hands, chanted some sort of spell. As they chanted, colors of red, blue, white and all colors grew from the tip of their staffs.

"Blades. They're coming in" Kirche informed everyone.

Blades.

Also something Crusaders often used. By inducing magic on their own staffs, this allowed it to prolong into a blade with a different color and power. Not only different in looks, because it was conjured up on a magical staff, its effects could last very long as well. Might as well say that this was a magic than can slice rocks into half in close up battles.

With Carlo being the lead, the Crusaders also began their assaults. Jumping in continuously from the window, the Ondine Knights also made blades to welcome them.

Fights broke out near the window.

Saito also ran in and joined them, holding Derflinger.

The Ondine Water Spirit Knights were basically dot mages. To compensate for their inabilities in magical power, they all had hands-on experience with Saito, himself taught by Agnes herself. Due to this additional help, they were still barely able to hold the Crusaders off.

Sounds of blades clashing with each other filled the tavern.

Malicorne waved his blade wildly, roaring. The analytical Reynald was quite adapt with these blade attacks, swiftly brought his sword down left and right, similar to how he beat one at chess, hunting down the enemy.

Gimli's fit body looked just like a barbarian right now, swinging his sword with all his might.

Tabitha who couldn't use magic anymore sat at the back reading a book. She understood that there was nothing she could help with, which made her actions so reasonable. Colbert, on the other hand, fought against the Crusaders with his staff.

If you asked about Kirche, she was currently taking care of the damages done to the inn with the innkeeper. Whenever a table or chair got smashed up during the fight, he would flick his Abacus and show it to Kirche.

"This, too expensive, isn't it?"

"No, no, these are all made from good wood! Ma'am!"

"Ask the Crusaders to pay the remaining half"

Louise was concerned about Saito while being disappointed at herself. *Void magic? Void of magic is more like it!* Irritated by herself, she gritted her teeth.

To let Louise rest in ease, Saito sent a Crusader flying with one blow of his. Fearing Gandálfr's unhuman speed, the Crusader took a few steps back. Unfortunately, Derflinger's handle had already landed into his stomach, making him pass out.

Saito looked around, searching for his next victim. Guiche, who was down to his last Valkyrie, was rapidly retreating under Carlo's aggression.

It was easy for Carlos to take on Guiche, who only had one Valkyrie, his hands holding a fake rose with no petals with a blade extending from the base.

As soon as he noticed Saito coming close, Guiche shook his head.

"Hey, I don't need your help. Relax, I haven't even started fighting yet"

Carlos smiled widely and confidently and launched himself at Guiche. His confident smile made him look like he hadn't even used half of his power yet.

"Oh? Then let me fulfill your wish to the maximum!"

Carlo whacked Guiche's fake rose away at high speed. Guiche fell back sitting on the ground.

"Defeat. I surrender. Saito, I'll leave to rest to you."

And started whistling fearlessly. Whichever side they were fighting for, they all broke into laughs.

Carlo smoothly turned his head.

"You're the next one right, name yourself"

Saito raised his sword in front of him, reporting his name like a noble.

"I am Saito Hiraga. Remember it."

"What a weird name."

"Shut up, you psycho."

Carlo laughed hearing Saito's insults and put out his staff. It might be 30 centimeter in length, but the aura around it had a radius of around 1 meter.

"You're really out of luck. I swear, your life is mine."

"Take it if you can."

Saito edged close step by step, occasionally slashing his sword at Carlo unexpectedly, but Carlo wasn't that simple either, and caught Derflinger with his staff.

Both of them bounced off each other.

Carlo saw through Saito's power instantly, infusing more magic into his staff.

"You. Really a plebeian?"

"Noble now."

The lime-colored aura around the staff grew even brighter.

"Ha!"

Following, Carlo continuously poked at Saito without reserving any of his might. Saito's eyes followed his every motion. No wonder Guiche could be beaten in an instant.

But Saito was different.

Saito saw through Carlo's motion, cutting his blade in half. Other than showing off, he actually wanted the enemy to lose his will to fight. Looking at the staff sliced in half, Carlo knelt on the floor.

"You. You bastard."

Saito said to the unsatisfied Carlo

"Please. Can you contact the Pope his holiness? You will know our status after doing so."

"Shameless words from despicable heretics! Ask yourself! For what reason would you and your bunch want to kidnap his holiness? I bet you're taking him away on that strange looking ship! Speak! Where do you plan to take him!"

Huh? Saito looked confused. Because of Carlo's words, the fight in the inn also stopped.

"Feels like we've been wronged?"

Bleeding from his forehead, Malicorne said clumsily.

"Kidnapping the Pope? What is this?"

The Crusaders started blaming them.

"You heretical kidnappers!"

The man who had been eating all along laughed, standing up behind the completely muddled Saito and the others.

"Carlo, you have done well, although the Pope was not kidnapped."

The face under the hat widened the Crusader's eyes. Together they put forth their Holy Cross and bowed to him.

"Cesare!"

Cesare? This name seemed familiar to Saito. Turning his head around, he opened his mouth but nothing came out. *Isn't that the person who fought alongside him in Albion, Julio!*

Julio stopped using his fake voice, and greeted Saito.

"I was once conductor for the Church's orchestra. Therefore I'm pretty good at faking voices. You were totally fooled, weren't you! Bwhahaahahah! Oh my, oh my, how long was it since we last met, Saito! Since sending you off at Albion's battlefield! Your safety is better than anything!"

Saito looked at Julio's face with shock.

"What's with your expression? Took us so long to meet each other again, yet you look like a frightened lizard!"

"What exactly is going on, would thou please explain how it turned like this?"

Carlo interrupted. Julio laughed even harder.

"Oh, that. Carlo, I was the one who made the rumors that his holiness is kidnapped. These people aren't anyone suspicious, but our guests"

"Huhhh? What does this mean?"

Seeing Saito and the others still confused as ever, Julio explained

"How would I not know that you will be arriving today. However, everything would be boring if you came to the Cathedral so smoothly, wouldn't it? Therefore, I prepared a enjoyable event for everyone. Spreading rumors of the Pope being kidnapped, then observing the outcome. Like planned, people like you were the first to be suspected. As for me, I followed you all the way from Cittadella. When I knew that you were preparing to land here, I got in as fast as I could. You guys were so insistent on fighting, none of you discovered that you were being followed, I was a little concerned before. Well, at the level of Crusaders, I'd say you've passed."

"This, all this for nought." The Crusaders were stunned.

The Ondine Water Spirit Knights wiped the blood off their foreheads.

"You jerk! Enjoying yourself! Because of you we almost got trialed!"

Julio did a little shrug.

"Religious trial? The things you are going to do soon will make you consider this to be kind. Not every mission can be completed waving your little swords and casting magic. There's danger involved in these missions, and I hope you can use your brains more than brute force."

Shifting his beady eyes to the stunned couple sitting in a corner, Julio walked up to Louise and Tiffania and bowed elegantly.

"Miss. Forgive us for being so rude to your arrival. But I did not expect meeting each other at this kind of place."

Julio laughed again. His attitude made the Crusaders frown. Doing whatever they wanted, the young Pope and his assisting priest made the Crusader's work hard to handle.

Outside came the sound of wings flapping. It was a wind dragon landing. It's Julio's "Azuro". Behind it was Sylphid being caught.

"You. That, I have a lot to talk to you about. Being displeased and that sort of stuff."

Saito said while his body was shaking heavily, yet Julio continued to drive

everyone out without giving him a look.

"Alright, alright, let's talk about this stuff while eating, shall we? Now then, let me lead everyone to the Cathedral."

Chapter 5: The Persuasion of the Pope

After arriving at the Cathedral, the first thing Louise did was greet Henrietta.

But for some reason, this Queen seemed to be quite distracted. She only acknowledged it saying "Oh, just in time." Even why Louise and the others were summoned to this country in the first place was not explained. Henrietta told Louise and Tiffania that the Pope his Holiness would explain later.

"Anyhow, the long journey must have tired you out. They have already prepared dinner. Please, enjoy yourselves first."

The dinner would be held in two different places.

Except for Saito, the Ondine Water Spirit Knights, Colbert, Kirche and Tabitha would share one room, while Louise, Tiffania and Saito would sit in the dining hall where the Pope would attend himself.

In the smaller room, they didn't have a single waiter, letting them to do as they please. Luckily, the members of the Ondine Knights did not seem to mind this kind of treatment. They were all celebrating today's battle, laughing and chatting loudly all the way.

Kirche looked at Colbert by her side. Since arriving at this Cathedral, he seemed to have a lack of enthusiasm. Leaving the untouched dish in front of him, he rested his chin on his knuckles, immersed in deep thoughts.

"What's wrong? Here, does it taste bad?"

Kirche indicated her soup by stirring it with a spoon.

"This soup really is disgusting. Other than spinach, there's nothing else. Having

this kind of priest like meal, it's my first experience."

Still, Colbert stayed in the same position without moving an inch after commenting.

"What's wrong with you? Are you alright?"

Kirche bent her head worriedly. Colbert finally lifted his head up in response.

"Eh? Oh, sorry. Nothing much"

He took a few sips from his soup, whipping out a ruby ring from his pocket once in a while, staring at it like a dead man with his eyes open. It was what he gave into Kirche's possession when he was about to die in his battle with Menvil. After Colbert was completely healed, Kirche gave this back to him promptly.

"What's with the ruby? Are you, thinking about your ex?"

Originally meant to be a joke, Colbert nodded his head out of Kirche's surprise.

"Umm, just like that"

Kirche winced her eyes, and put a small cooked lobster on his head, although he was just as motionless. Not wanting other people to see her any more jealous, Kirche found someone else to talk to. At her side, Tabitha was eating expressionlessly.

"Hey, Tabitha. What do you think they are talking about in the dining hall?"

Tabitha slowly finished her cup of wine and answered

"Don't know"

On the other end of the corridor inside the dining hall, no one said of anything and kept putting food in their mouths in awkward silence. Louise was sitting next to Saito, whereas Tiffania was sitting on the other side of him.

Today's incident wasn't something Saito could easily let go. Every now and then, Saito would stare angrily at Julio, grinding his teeth and food, thinking "Huh, that bastard"

Tiffania nervously shrunk into her seat. Holding the fork and knife in her hand tightly, the plate served just now, she had not taken a single bite, already cut into an unknown number of pieces now.

In front of her was the one who called Louise and the others there, Henrietta.

Likewise to Colbert, Henrietta was also deep in thoughts, focusing dully on the wine glass in front of her. On the side of Henrietta sat Captain of the guns squadron, Agnes, but she also seemed to be considering something silently.

Sitting at the end of the table, was Pope St. Aegis the 32nd, Vittorio Serevare, listening to Julio's daily report.

Not long ago, Louise, Saito and Tiffania, 3 of them were allowed to see Pope Vittorio alone. He used the caring, smiling face of his to welcome them all.

First, Louise was stunned by his handsome face. He was just like an elf, mysterious and mighty.

Next thing Louise felt, was the overwhelming warm feeling radiating from him. It's only something one can feel from those who had sacrificed all their desires for others. Just taking one sight of him, Louise felt as if she understood why he was able to become Pope at such a young age.

Saito also seemed to be experiencing what Louise was right now. His jaw dropped at the sight of the glamorous Vittorio, then quickily changed to a smile of defeat.

"Julio that kid may be handsome but he has his irritating side, but this person is completely different. So these people do exist in the world" Saito relayed his thoughts to Louise back then.

After that the dinner began. The only words spoken so far were from Vittorio, all of them comforting words, but irrelevant to the case. Not being able to raise a question on her side, Louise uncomfortably calmed down her mind.

What is this thing that Henrietta and Pope his Holiness wants us to see?

Louise jabbed Saito beside her and said

"Hey"

"Huh?"

"What are her majesty and his Holiness planning to let us look at?"

"Dunno. I guess we will find out after this dinner. It may be extremely shocking, therefore a filled up stomach will surely calm you down."

Just like what Saito said, it's pointless to be thinking all day long. And so, Louise extended her hand to reach the food.

Hearing the report, Vittorio deeply bowed to everyone.

"My familiar must have caused you trouble"

Hearing him say this, Louise and Saito both, "Puffffff!", spit out everything in their mouths.

"Your Holiness, just now, what did you say?"

"I was apologizing for the trouble caused. Julio, why did you do these things without informing me? I only said 'Hope you may welcome them'."

Julio's hetero-chromatic eyes shined, and chuckled.

"No, not that!"

Louise unconsciously stood up.

"Just now, your Holiness said 'familiar'?"

"Yes, that is correct."

Julio looked at Saito and Louse, then said while nodding,

"We are brothers, gifted with the power to guide people to the correct paths, brothers wielding legendary power."

Saito and the others were all astonished by this sudden confession from Julio. Julio then casually took off the glove on his right hand.

On his hand, a chain of letters similar to Gandálfr's inscription was marked.

"I am the right hand of God. Vindálfr. Saito, you and me are like brothers."

"Vindálfr", Tiffania murmured to herself.

"Because Miss Tiffania still does not possess a familiar, that will be 3 bearers, 2 familiars, and..."

Vittorio eyed the Founder's Prayer book lying beside Louise

"A secret treasure, two rings, all inside this room"

Julio whispered softly in Vittorio's ear

"Ring, there is one more that can be counted"

"In that case, then there are 3 rings. So this is it."

The dining hall was filled with tension. In the middle of this stifling air, Vittorio turned to Henrietta.

Henrietta nodded deeply with a concerned face.

"Then, today, the reason for everyone's presence here is none other than what you are expecting. I hope you may all help me."

"Help in?"

At this point, Henrietta opened her mouth and offered to continue for him.

After Saito and Louise had finished listening to what Henrietta had to say, they widened their eyes at this ridiculous task. Eventually returning to reality, Louise opened her mouth and said,

"Anyhow, what your Majesty is trying to say is, to use our power, and to reclaim the holy land back from the elves' hands? How is this different from the Reconquista people?"

"No, it's not like that, Louise. It's to discuss. War is foolish. Both of you have made me realize this point."

"Then, why must we reclaim the holy land?"

This time Vittorio cut in,

"It's because that place is where we belong. Why do wars exists? Why do the governors of this world, us, sheepishly declare war with different clans? Simply said, this state exists because of the loss of our destined land."

Vittorio's calm voice stood out from the rest and he continued,

"During the thousands of years after we've lost the holy land, we've been in a state of low self-confidence. Our promised lands conquered by unfamiliar people, is unhealthy for the overall population. Losing confidence, we have been seeking cheap replacements. Pointless fights over countless lands, we have bled a lot unnecessarily."

Louise could not counter his statements. This is Halkeginia's history.

"Reclaiming the promised lands. Revealing the legendary power. Only at this moment, our true confidence can come back to life. Only through this, we are able to construct our glorious future. When Halkeginia is finally united, there will be no more wars."

Vittorio calmly spoke of the word "united". This was a word which appeared often in countless Halkeginia kings' dreams.

United.

"As the descendants of our Founder Brimir, everyone of us, in front of God and Founder himself are all brothers and sisters."

Louise's was swayed by these words. On the other hand, her instinct continued to tell her that there's a catch here somewhere. Before Louise was able to voice out her thoughts, Saito cut in,

"Then, may I speak a few words? Your Holiness."

"Please do."

Saito said apologetically,

"I, my, I'm not too smart, therefore what your Holiness said, I do not quite understand it. From what I hear, your meaning is that we should pick up our swords, and threaten them to take the land back, is that what you meant?"

"Yes. It's just that. Not very different from what you said."

Vittorio decisively confirmed Saito's description.

"How could we? Just because they are foreigners (elves), these things are permitted? I really don't think this will result in anything good."

"We believe to bless every single person is too arrogant."

Vittorio straightforwardly replied.

"My hands are small. These hands which God gave me, if I were to use them to care for every single creature in this world, then it would not be enough. I am a believer in Brimir. Therefore the first ones I should bless is Romalian pilgrims for their well-being. Am I wrong in doing so?"

"I don't think you are wrong. But...."

Saito paused a while for his brain to process. Henrietta opened her mouth, as if to persuade Saito to change his mind, and said,

"Saito. I also considered it thoroughly myself, and also agree with the Pope's wishes. I have sheepishly triggered a pointless war before, but I do not wish for history to repeat itself again. This is what I think. If you can use your power to stop a war, then I believe that is also a kind of justice."

"I refuse."

Saito made himself clear.

"Saito..."

Henrietta seemed to have something else to say, but Saito unerringly shook his head.

"Doing these things is too despicable! Tiffania sitting here, has elven blood

flowing in her right now. I do not want to do anything similar to threatening Tiffania's mother"

Tiffania bit her lips. Although she has been thinking a lot, she believed there was no place for her to talk.

Henrietta stood up and walked next to Tiffania's side.

"Greetings, Tiffania. I am your cousin Henrietta"

She said, holding Tiffania's hands.

Tiffania answered, stupefied.

"Cousin"

"That's right. Your father Sir Montreal (Prince of Montreal), not only was he the brother of the previous Albion King, he was also the brother of our previous Tristain King Henry. Which goes and say, you are my cousin."

Henrietta hugged Tiffania tightly.

"Ohh, my lovely cousin. I am sorry to remind you of all your painful memories. I also hope that you will forgive me for not being able to announce this fact to the public."

Tiffania hugged her only relative back, tears dropping form her eyes uncontrollably. The dining hall was veiled by silence momentarily. But then, through sobs, Tiffania still asked Henrietta,

"Your Majesty. Are you going to fight with my mother's clan?"

"It's not like that. We just want to tell them peacefully, to return that land to us. After all, that land was originally ours. I was hoping, during the discussion, the blood that's flowing through you will become a bridge never before crossed between us and them."

Tiffania hung her head, then softly replied,

"I, really do not understand difficult things. But, if my power can be of help to

everyone, I believe, that there is nothing more more joyful that this."

"You are willing to help us?"

Tiffania turned to the surprised Saito.

"If Saito, says so, then I would also help. It is Saito who brought me to the world outside. If Saito decides to do so, then I am also willing to follow."

"Saito..."

Henrietta looked at Saito, almost begging. Seeing Henrietta like this, his determination was slightly swayed, but in the end, he still couldn't accept it.

"I am sorry. Your Holiness and your Majesty's ideals are very attractive. But I do not want to use Louise's and my power because of this"

"Louise, what do you think?"

Henrietta turned to Louise in despair....

Louise was confused.

What Henrietta and Vittorio said were undoubtedly correct.

She was also one of Halkeginia's nobles.

As a noble, it was always first priority to consider Halkeginia's needs. Otherwise, it would be meaningless carrying the title of a noble. If this event happened a long time ago, Louise might have nodded her head towards Henrietta's beliefs.

But, the Louise now was different.

She did not, just because the others were elves, want to do these forceful actions.

Among the peasants, there were all sorts of people.

It must be the same for elves, all sorts of elves. There would be bad elves, as well as good elves. Through Saito and Tiffania's conversation, Louise also thought this way.

Conveying Louise's silent response, Henrietta gave a smile, nodded her head and said,

"Most certainly, it may be a very difficult choice for you to make. But, it is a choice you have to make eventually. Before you are certain, I hope that you will not forget, the meaning of the cape kept in your mother's possession. The marks stitched on it, are not decorations. Those marks represent the responsibility for Tristain's future, as well as the entire Halkeginia's future."

Yet even after Henrietta have said so, Louise was still motionless. Something was rejecting this idea in her mind.

Henrietta turned again to Saito.

"You too, are fighting for Louise's sake, aren't you? To save the person you treasure most, you will do whatever you need to. I too am the same. I cannot stand the conflicts between people. Therefore, I will also do what I must."

"For this, you do not care what happens to the elves?"

Hearing Saito's question, Henrietta nodded her head.

"I am Queen of a country of humans. Same as his Holiness, there is a limit to what my hand can cover."

These words carried a powerful effect behind them.

Vittorio said uncaringly,

"It has already been 3 years for me as the Romalia Pope. In this period, there was only 1 thing I learned"

Pausing in between, Vittorio said with force,

"Love cannot save everyone."

Everyone continued their dinner speechless.

Not before long, Saito raised another question.

"Then, may I ask another question?"

Vittorio nodded his head, chuckling.

"Please do."

"Assembling the void users is nice, really, but what about the Gallian side?"

That's right. Gallia's void user and his familiar always had their eyes on Louise and the other bearers.

Also, undoubtedly there would be the Gallian King Joseph and the elves who wield powerful Ancient Magic waiting in the shadows. To think that they would help this side was impossible.

To everyone's surprise, Vittorio laughed.

"Of course, I have my own way to solve this problem. It is exactly because of that I called this meeting here."

"What do we do?"

"In 3 days, my third anniversary coronation ceremony will be held. Right at the city near Gallian borders, the city of Aquileia. Of course, the Gallian King will also attend."

"He will?"

"Who knows. It does not matter whether he comes or not. My point is, Miss Vallière, Miss Westwood. I hope you will also attend this."

Louise seemed to have noticed something and stood up,

"Are you suggesting to use us as bait?"

"It is my ceremony. Prior to this, I have already spread news of me being a void user to Gallia, meaning you won't be the only ones being the bait. I am a person that would feel uncomfortable if I'm not part of the plan."

"This is too dangerous!"

"I understand about the danger. But, keep in mind that if you keep being on alert it would be even more dangerous. What does Gallian King Joseph wants? I'm

afraid it's to eliminate all void users not in his grasp, and to turn Halkeginia into his own. He may be jeered as an incompetent King by his subjects, but I beg to differ. His is a cunning, cruel, emotionless man. The title "Incompetent King" is just a disguise for his ambitions. He can be cunning enough to that extent. Only if all three of us congregate together, he will commence his attacks."

"Then, how are you prepared for it?"

Intrigued, Saito asked further on.

"Saito!"

Louise angrily bellowed with laser eyes focused on Saito.

"How is this bad? Just now I may have refused, but this is a different matter and I agree with it. The arrogance in that Gallian King, I have long despised. Not only did he brutally attack us, but also did such unforgivable things to Tabitha. I will never forgive him. If we are going to kill him eventually, it's better to do it as early as possible."

Saito's words made a pleased Vittorio nod,

"I fear he will send his familiar first. It's that Myoznitnirn you have encountered a few times before. That woman who uses magical items."

"I suppose."

"We must capture Myoznitnirn with all our force, but must not kill her."

"Why is that?"

"If we kill her, then Joseph can summon another familiar again. Must capture her alive, keep her alive. This way, the Gallian void user cannot summon another familiar. Without a familiar, that void user's power will decrease by half. It will be a great chance for us to then go and negotiate, dropping his title as a king once and for all. After that happens, it might even be possible for your friend to take the throne."

"This is great! Let's do it then!"

Henrietta looked at Saito with trust. Julio joined in and laughed. Tiffania nodded her head.

Yet, only Louise was shaking her head alone.

"I refuse."

"Why!"

Saito looked at Louise, not understanding why. Louise was astonished by their optimism, as well as at her boiling point. Although there were 3 void bearers in this room, there were only 2 familiars, Saito and Julio. However, Julio was Vindálfr. Even if he could control excellent beasts, between the battle of familiars they were still at a slight disadvantage.

Yes, in the eyes of those Albion dragon knight, Saito might be very used to fights.

But that was only under normal circumstances. Now we were talking about void, with all sorts of magical weapons flying around on the battle field, how useful could he be?

And it didn't end there. Tiffania was only capable of using one spell. The effects might be strong, but it was not a spell one could apply directly on the battlefield. As for Vittorio's power, no one knew. Perhaps he might be very powerful, but Louise just could't imagine how much battle experience that soft and gentle Pope had. In a battle, the spell's power wasn't everything, because if one had enough experience, even a dot level mage could defeat a triangle mage.

In comparison, although there were only 2 people as the enemy, their true power was still unknown.

The Myoznitnirn capable of controlling any magical weapon.

Along with the help of the Elves who commanded formidable Ancient Magic.

Louise might not have lost before, but she couldn't win either.

No, the reason Louise survived through all of that, could only be her luck.

There was also the possibility that the enemy had not unveiled their true power yet.

Remembering the Jörmungand some time ago, Louise shuddered. To defeat one was already tricky enough. What if they had 5?

No matter how, Louise did not agree that their victory was possible.

"Just facing Myoznitnirn alone has been difficult enough. I cannot imagine how tough it would be when she's accompanied by another void user. It's too dangerous. We must be more careful."

"We need courage. Courage capable of changing our current state. We must end this before the enemy obtains even greater power."

Vittorio pointed out.

"Louise, I think his Holiness is right."

You idiot! Louise blamed Saito in her thoughts. *We may have 5 people over here, but isn't the one fighting the most going to be you?*

Actually, it's only Saito himself

Saito must fight alone to buy time for Louise to chant her spells. Facing the enemies, who would be giving it their all, alone.

But, these words did not come out.

If it was said out loud, most would think that the master was putting himself/herself's safety first. Willing to become bait himself, for a Pope daring enough to say this, Vittorio should be the first. Since the Pope already decided it, nobles who disagree with him shouldn't be nobles at all. Even for Romalia Pilgrims, even as a heretic, there really was nothing to disagree with.

Louise was bitter, but she was not able to voice out any rejections.

"Even though, I still disagree. I cannot let the Pope's body be exposed to the danger of this plan."

Vittorio continued to smile and said,

"That's alright, you would not agree to a suggestion as sudden as this immediately. Please take your time to consider it. You will slowly change your point of view and see that I am right."

Chapter 6: Long Spear

Dawn of the next day.

"Uhh", Saito rubbed his eyes and sat up straight.

After that last night no one spoke anymore, the dinner naturally ended as well.

At his side Louise was still in a deep slumber. Probably exhausted from yesterday's incident. After the dinner, Louise was contemplating all the way until she reached her room, where she jumped inside her bed immediately.

Saito was thinking, putting what he had said at the beginning aside, about the plan of involving the Gallian King which he'd have no complaints about.

Using force to threaten elves, he'd have no interest in that, but as for the Gallian king, it's another issue. There's no one worse than that person. To satisfy his own desires, he assaulted Louise and Saito, killed Tabitha's father, drove her mother crazy, and made Tabitha go through hell literally.

Unforgivable.

Logically, Louise should have thought about this way as well, why would she ever disagree.

He couldn't come up with a good reason. The Pope's plan is certainly dangerous, but it's much more assuring than not knowing when you'd be assaulted. Besides, as soon as this matter ended, there would be no reason to fear an attack anymore.

In every possible scenario, isn't it always better to solve it earlier?

Just as Saito was thinking in this direction, someone knocked on their door.

Saito opened it, just to face Julio with heterochromic eyes, smiling.

"Morning, brother"

"There's no such relationship between you and me!"

Hearing Saito's irritated curses, Julio chuckled.

"Don't say that, we're both familiars, shouldn't we be friendly towards each other?"

"Jerk. You're not the type I want to get along with. No one ever knows whatever is on your mind. What business do you have, coming here so early"

Saito never liked Julio much from the start because of his compliments at Albion which made Louise blush. Someone who had jealousy as profound as Saito was determined not to give Louise away.

Julio neglected Saito's unpleasant attitude and beckoned.

"There are things we want you to see."

"Want me?"

"Yes. It's about to be ready."

"What about Louise?"

Julio shook his head.

"It's only for your eyes."

Julio brought Saito to the basement of the grand Cathedral, a place which intuitively made people feel suspicious. Past the spiral staircase downwards was a damp underground tunnel. Weak dancing fires illuminated the sides of the tunnel. Saito pressed forwards while feeling uncertain, and eventually reached a place completely dark.

Julio picked up the lit up firewood hanging on the sides of the wall and proceeded.

The surroundings seemed to be chilly. Turned out icy air was blowing from the interiors.

"This really is a terribly creepy place. There aren't any monsters, I hope?"

Saito said, hugging his body and rubbing his shoulders. Julio chuckled.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. After all, this is a cemetery left behind from the ancient eras. It's also the reason why this is constructed."

"Oh so it's a cemetery. You have really taken me to some horrible place."

Saito complained but continued to follow Julio with a trembling body into a fairly wider area. Inside this circular shaped, cylindrical shaped place, was a rectangular steel gate. It was covered entirely with red rust and layers of dust. To believe that it was still in use would be surprising.

"So? You brought me here to look at a grave? I'm not especially fascinated to look at these stuff in the early morning"

"Somewhat. Though say this is a cemetery, what's sleeping inside is not a person."

"Huuhhh?"

The steel door was heavily sealed. Inserting the key brought along into the gigantic lock, then, "Clack!", a loud unlocking sound echoed throughout the tunnel.

Julio took down the chains and grasped the handle to the door with force, giving a forced moan unmatching his face and pulled. Yet still, the door didn't even bulge.

"This isn't easy at all. Completely rusted. Are you going to help?"

Julio stuck out his tongue and hurried Saito.

Sucking his own lip in, Saito reached out his hands to the door. Giving everything they've got, the door, after a loud "Bang!", gave away. Dust flew, making Saito choke and cough.

The door lead to a pitch black room.

Julio raised his torch up high, but the interiors were just as dark. It seemed that the room was quite spacious. Julio started to search for the magic lamps positioned on the walls.

"I think it should be around here"

"What do you want me to look at. If it's a normal grave then I'll really be angry"

"Alright, alright, you will definitely be frightened. Ah, here we go!"

Julio placed his hand inside the magic lantern and pressed down the switch.

And so, all the other lights inside the room lit up simultaneously.

From the darkness a room as large as two churches came out of no where.

"This, what's this"

Seeing the items placed inside, Saito was too surprised to breathe normally.

"Impressed, eh?"

Saito did not even hear Julio's words. He was completely crushed by the sight in front of him. What Saito saw lying on the shelves to his right, were guns.

Not any common gun you can find in Halkeginia.

The structure was obviously different.

Saito tried and lifted one up. It seemed kind of heavy. When holding it, the marking on his left hand started to glow.

"..."

Saito looked at this gun speechless. Under the fine quality of the wooden covered barrel, protruded a box shaped magazine. Throughout the entire Halkeginia, there was definitely not a gun with rapid fire like that one.

Saito looked at the belly of the barrel. Familiar Latin characters jumped into his eyes.

ENGLAND

"It's made in England."

That's right, it's an item from Earth. Saito then picked up another gun. This was a familiar gun seen in televisions and games, Saito remembered that, wasn't that the famous Russian made gun?

"That's it. An AK-47."

He unplucked a magazine from the English rifle. The bullets were filled up to the top. Next to the rifle lay an M16, revolvers, and various semi-automatic handguns.

There were in total around 10 modern guns. Although some of them were damaged from inside, but a number of them were still gleaming brightly stainless from rust.

Julio explained,

"Although we have used a statis spell to preserve these as soon as we found them, some of them broke, or even worse, into pieces"

On the shelf next to that one, were all old guns. They included musket guns and matchlock guns currently in use by Halkeginia. The only difference was, from the look of the words inscribed on the guns, they were all items from Earth.

There were in total a few dozen of them.

Progressing even further down the shelves, there were more ancient weapons. All sorts or swords, spears, crossbows, even a boomerang. However these sorts of weapons were already indistinguishable from Halkeginia's, though the katana made Saito realise that these were also once part of Earth.

Next to the handheld weapons were all sorts of other stuff. There was something like a cannon, and even a rare thing like a rocket launcher. However, those were all broken down.

Sprawling on the ground the head of a fighter jet aircraft was also quite intimidating.

"Why are these things here?"

"In the eastern lands, our spies have started collecting these things a few centuries ago. On that side, we occasionally find these kind of items. To transport these things under the elves' noses sure was a tough job."

Saito remembered Seista's great grandfather. He too was Japan's navy fighter pilot. According to legends, he also came from the eastern lands.

"I say the eastern grounds, but more accurately, it should be weapons found near the holy grounds."

Julio then pointed inside.

"This isn't all."

Illuminated by the dim light, a small hill shaped item sat there covered by a cloth. Shouldered by the light, it seemed just like a tent.

"What's that."

"See for yourself."

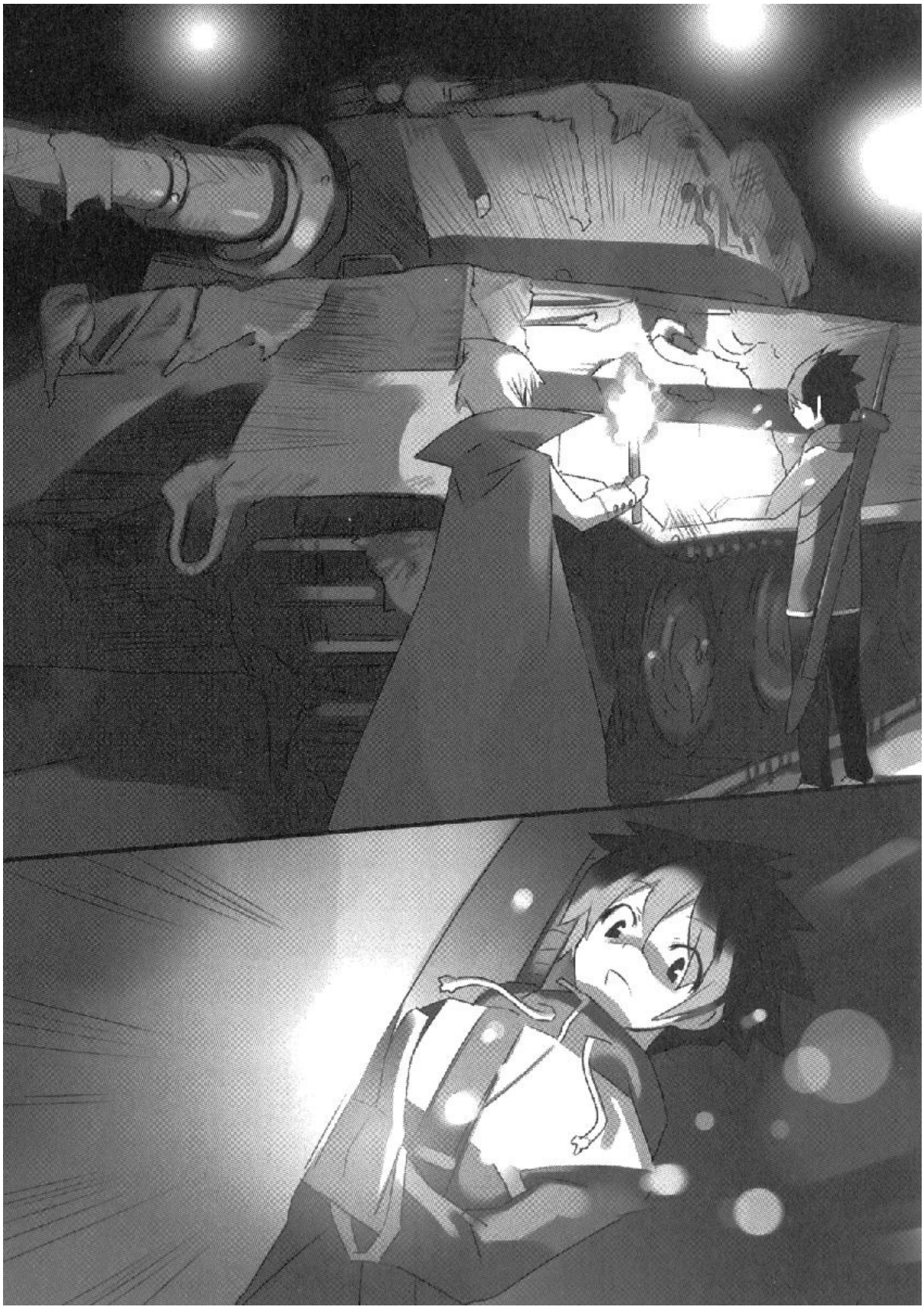
Julio calmly walked forward, unpeeled the cloth. The fabric dropping onto the ground triggered a storm of dust.

Peering through the flying dust, the silhouette of the object gradually appeared, making Saito once again speechless.

"E-even this kind of stuff."

It was a humongous metal box. The heavy steel plates assembled as a box overwhelmed Saito like a two-storey building.

Furthermore, on top of the box, a long barrel extended outwards.



"Tank"

Sitting there silently, the tank gave off an ominous presence. From it's heavily layered grey paint like trams from the old days, one can imagine the era it came from.

On the tank's side was a distinctive white cross. The turret carried a white "324" number and its badge.

"It's a German Tiger tank!"

Saito once made a model of it when he was small. Seeing it really brought back a lot of memories, but to see the real thing was an unimaginable chance. This was completely irrelevant to the props used in movies. The real tank was intimidating, sturdy, gigantic, heavy. The zero fighter plane gave people a sumptuous feel, but this war machine delivered raw power and shock, deeply imprinting a sense that it was made purely for destruction into everyone's minds.

Saito gently skimmed the exterior of the tank. Icy cold, the dark steel surface chilled Saito's hand. In the darkness, Saito's inscriptions on his left hand flickered brightly.

This tank is still alive, his instincts told him.

"Impressive. Even installing cannons on a wagon. Not only is it huge, but it also comes with intricate switches! This is what we call an untimely piece of art. So? Did it leave an impression."

Saito growled.

"You"

"We, not only with these kind of weapons, but have also encountered people like you a countless number of times. Yes, it all started a few centuries ago. As for who and what kind of person you are, we are completely familiar with."

Saito snorted.

"Is that so. Forget it, it's pointless to keep this secret anymore. True, I do come from the other world. So what. It's very nostalgic, that's all. What are you trying

to plan again?"

"You know,you have the same destination as us. The holy ground conceals the reason of bringing items here. If you were to go there, you will find a way to go back, no?"

Hearing Julio's words, Saito laughed.

"What, so that's what you were thinking. Like I said previously, I do not intend to change my point of view. Threatening with the powers of void to steal land, I have no interest in getting involved. The plan about the Gallian king is another issue, I will not accompany you to do that kind of things."

While it might be true that seeing items from Earth made Saito nostalgic, but it was no more than the effect of seeing Japanese items at a museum in a foreign country. It was not enough to dissuade him.

"Alright, let's leave. Coming to Romalia from somewhere so distant, I do not want to spend my time standing around at this kind of damp place. There's a lot of sightseeing to do."

"Oh oh, don't misunderstand us. I never thought of making you listen to me. Our original intention was to gift these untimely work of art to you."

"Gift?"

"Uh-huh, in both reasoning, you are also the lawful owner of these weapons. First, these things came from your world. Reasonably, they are all yours to begin with."

Julio raised his index finger, which was soon accompanied by his middle finger.

"Another reason. This reason is even more important. These are all your stuff, Gandálfr"

"what do you mean?"

"In another words, this is your long spear."

"Spear?"

"Yes. Do you know the song?"

Julio sang a song with a clear loud voice. He definitely lives up to his title of being the choirmaster. His tone was very impressive.

The left hand of God is Gandálfr, the ferocious shield of the lord. His left hand wields a large sword and his right hand wields a long spear, protecting me with endless vigilance. The right hand of God is Vindálfr, the kind-hearted flute of the lord. He dominates all beasts of life, leading me through earth, sky, and water. The mind of God is Myoznitnirn, the book that carries the crystallization of thought. It carries all knowledge and provides advice whenever I am in need. There is one more person, but remembering its name gives me trouble… Taking the four disciples, I came to this land…

Saito nodded his head.

"Uh, I've heard of Tiffania singing this before."

"I am Vindálfr, can control all sorts of beasts. Including women. Actually, women are not as easy to deal with as beasts."

"Yeah, yeah."

Saito recalled Julio's amazing skills with taming dragons at Albion. Even the leader of the dragon riders' squad René once said so himself.

That guy, even though he's a priest, he really knows how to handle a dragon.

"Next is Myoznitnirn. That suspicious Gallian lady, who can freely use magical items. You know, you have dealt with her a few times already. She brings unpredictable fear! In normal battles she could be called the strongest. Ahh, creepy woman! That kind of lady I'd have to say no thanks!"

Julio brought his face close to Saito.

"Lastly, you are Gandálfr, capable of freely using any kind of weapons. Also the last one, I know it's not clear, but it's irrelevant right now, is you. You! Wasn't that in the lyrics? Sword in the left hand means Delfringer, while this, is the long spear in your right hand."

"No matter at what angle, this doesn't look like a long spear at all"

Saito said pointing at the Tiger tank.

"Gandálfr's left hand uses a sword to protect his master. The remaining right hand is here to attack the enemies. Sensibly, it would have been holding the most powerful weapon people of that time could think of."

"Whaaa?"

"Power depends on range. In terms of weapons, yes, the spear is made to defeat sword wielding enemies at a further range. The proof is that swordsman usually can't defeat a pikeman. There's no idiot charging and waving a sword around in battles nowadays because we all have guns. Swords isn't limited to Delfringer, but to the most common self-defense weaponry. 6000 years ago, the most powerful weapon was a spear, the most useful and common defensive weapon was a sword. As times changed, weapons also evolved. To defeat enemies at an even longer range than spear new weapons emerged, eventually bringing us to guns and cannons. You people, however, seem to have brought guns to an even further stage."

Julio exclaimed patting the Tiger tank.

"Don't you feel amazed? Why are all the items from your world weapons, not everyday items"

"Your sampling pool is too small, I guess"

"Perhaps. Founder Brimir's magic still remains today at the holy grounds, and will occasionally gift us with items like these. Connecting the dots, these weapons awarded by Brimir, should belong to Gandálfr's possession. Therefore these are your stuff, Gandálfr."

Saito felt his chest thump. So this is what they call the spears. His Zero Fighter, that rocket launcher, are all here due to Founder's Brimir's magic.

Moreover, his presence here was probably due to the same reason.

"Alright, because of this reason we gift these to you. These items will never be used in our possession, we can't imitate and produce more, we don't know how

to repair them when they wear down. No matter how powerful of a gun this is, if you can't mass produce it, it's meaningless. Honestly, we can't even make these bullet shells right. Your world really holds unimaginable technology. You are even more incredible than elves!"

"There's a door on the holy grounds?"

"Yeah. What else did you think? At the holy land there's a cave. Should be a cave made from void magic. Must be. Therefore, I believe if we went to the holy land, you'd be able to find a way to go back. In other words, your home is the same as our objective, isn't it?"

Saito shook his head.

"If I ever wanted to go back, I will use my own methods to get there. Although you have your own reasons, but in my point of view, I do not want to align myself with the enemies of elves. Those who hurt other people are another matter. Anyhow, this I'd gladly receive. They may become useful in the next battle. Besides, I know someone who likes the company of these kind of items. I bet he'd be overjoyed."

Julio shook his head and rested his hand on Saito's shoulders.

"You're really stubborn! But that's what I like about you! So, wanna go get a drink with me. This time I wouldn't give you a hard time. I know a place with lots of pretty girls! Come and enjoy Romalia"

Saito glanced at Julio helplessly, then paced outwards.

As soon as he was about to leave, he turned back.

The steel "spears", which seemed to be prepared just for him, waited silently in the dark for their turn in war.

Pope Vittorio was used to praying at the hall alone everyday after breakfast. This was what Vittorio called "free time".

For the pope, who had always been up to his neck with formal matters, the time

when he prayed was the only time where he could relax himself. The hall was situated at the second floor of the Cathedral. Commoners were, of course, forbidden to enter. On the sides of the entrance to the hall, two holy knights stood guard to protect the praying pope.

As soon as Colbert approached the doors, the guards raised their staffs.

"What is it"

"My apologies, there are some business I wish to discuss with the Pope."

"The Pope is currently praying."

"Then please let me wait here."

"Have you reserved?"

"No"

"Then I cannot allow you to stay here."

The guards waved their staffs in a way indicating he should leave. Despite their conversation and actions, Colbert didn't leave at all. One of the holy knights worriedly whispered to the other one, in case this was some famous celebrity.

"May we have your name."

"I am a teacher from the Tristain magical academy, Colbert Jean."

The knights snorted in disapproval. A mere teacher, how could they let him disturb the Pope praying.

Just as the knights were about to point their staffs at him, along the corridor came a short golden haired lady knight. She wore a tunic suited for moving around instead of the dress she wore when she first arrived.

Though her face looks no more than a teen's, she was wearing a cape. From the cape alone, one can deduce that she was a noble.

"Miss Agnes."

The knights greeted the captain of Queen Henrietta's firearms squad. Agnes nodded to them in return.

"Do you also wish to discuss with the Pope?"

"Yes," Agnes nodded her head, then turned towards Colbert.

"Looks like we're here for the same thing"

"Uh"

Colbert took a deep breath, grasping the ruby in his pocket tightly. Seeing that Colbert was an acquaintance of Agnes, they did not trouble him any more and returned to their positions.

After around 30 minutes, the door opened. The knights bowed.

Once Vittorio noticed someone waiting for him, he appeared to sigh.

"Isn't this Miss Agnes. Are you alright?"

Agnes looked at Vittorio in the eye and said.

"I have issues I wish to ask your holiness"

Vittorio nodded.

"Towards Tristain's firearms captain's inquiries, I guess I'll have to make time to answer then. Ah, you too."

Colbert seemed to be hinting something important and said.

"There are items I should return to your holiness"

"Is that so, looks like both of you have very important reasons. Then let's not stand here, come to my office."

At his office, Vittorio sat on his chair and welcomed.

"Please, take a seat."

Agnes, however, did not take the offer but instead went directly into the main subject.

"Please excuse my rudeness. May I ask if your holiness know of a lady named Vittoria? She was a female who escaped 20 years ago to the village of Protestants, D’Angleterre."

Vittorio nodded.

"I do. She was my mother."

Agnes's face seemed to distort a little. Rare tears surfaced in Agnes's eyes and knelt one knee on the ground. Colbert, in contrast seemed to have blood drained out of his face.

"I was right, from the first sight of your holiness I noticed. Your face, was too similar with Vittoria's. Your holiness, please accept my gratitude in stead of your mother. My life was saved by your mother. Our village was burned down to ashes by the despicable conspirators. Vittoria lost her life over saving me."

Vittorio chuckled.

"Is that so, good. Saving someone even at her last moments."

The next to kneel was Colbert.

"Your holiness. Please give me your punishments."

"Why?"

"That lady, the one who used fire to burn your mother to death, was exactly me. I would never have thought it was your holiness's mother. How cruel fate is. It must be God's wish for me to accept your holiness's punishments that I came to Romalia."

Agnes sorrowfully claimed,

"It was an order wasn't it? You have not sinned. Those who did were the ones issuing the orders. Besides, I have already executed those who gave orders with my own hands."

"But! But! The one who did this was me! My right hand waved the staff! My mouth sang the spell!"

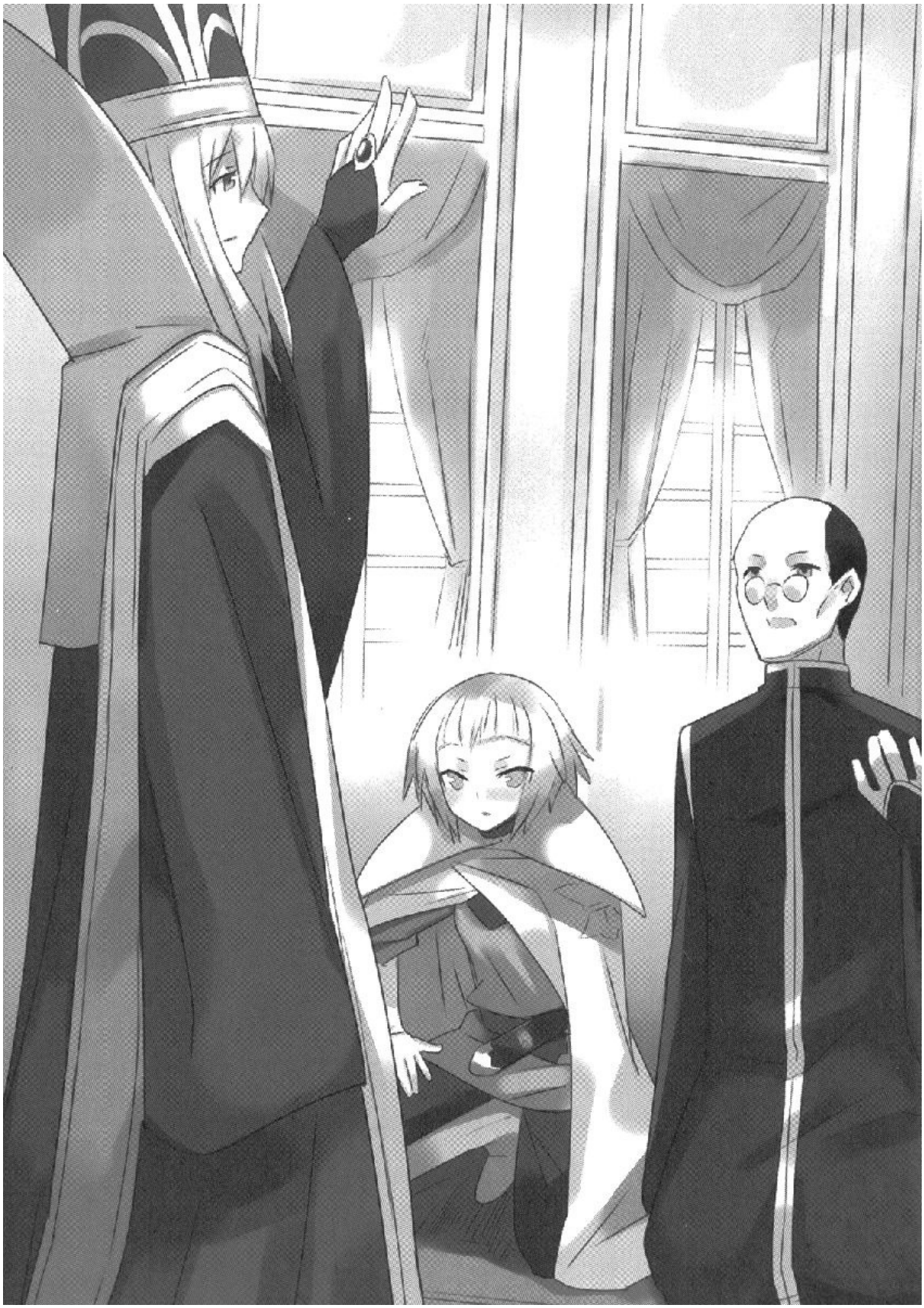
"No more!"

Agnes stared at Colbert, but Colbert continued,

"This, is your mother's ring. Please take this back and give me your verdicts"

Vittorio looked at the ruby. His eyes widened, but immediately returned to peace. Slowly stretching his hand out to receive the ring, he then wore it on his finger.

The ring slowly slid in, fitting perfectly on his finger.



"I must thank you. This ruby of flames have not touched my fingers for 21 years"

"Thank?"

"Yes. Perhaps you may not know, but we are currently looking for this ruby. I never imagined it would return to me in this way. Today is a great day. It's really a great day."

"Then if you will, your holiness, please punish me."

"Why, why must I give you punishment? I should give you my blessings, not a punishment."

"But, your holiness, I've taken your holiness' mother's li--"

Vittorio looked at the ring and said,

"She was a weak person. Scared of her son's god-blessed power, took the ring and escaped."

Colbert and Agnes focused on Vittorio. In his eyes, there was no fury at all towards the murderer of his mother.

Those eyes gave off a sense of zealousness towards his religion, nearly to the point of madness.

"She was obsessed with the heretics, her beliefs were mistaken. Not only this, she escaped her fate. Executing her with your hands, it could be said this is God's verdict to her."

"Your holiness."

As if reminiscing something, Vittorio closed his eyes.

"Left behind, I had to work harder than anyone else. To prevent others from saying things behind my back just because I had a mother who had the wrong religion, I buried myself in studies of theology. Because of my efforts, I was awarded my current status."

Vittorio placed his right hand on Colbert's head. Colbert felt fear towards the Pope's unnatural religious belief. Refusing human emotions, only yearning for God, this male seem to hold something deep inside him.

"Therefore, I will not give you punishment, hereby I give you my blessings. Mister Colbert Jean, may you have God and Founder Brimir's blessings"

Chapter 7: World Door

In accordance with the pope coronation ceremony, The Knight Corps of the Water Spirit was practicing with high vigor in the courtyard. From outward performance they were called to escort Henrietta who will attend the ceremony. But in reality, the true aim was to seize the enemy of both Henrietta and the Pope. That's why they were in high spirit when they found out.

“For this honored duty Her Majesty has chosen us!!“

Malicorne shouted, and immediately following were loud cheers.

“Stop the conspiracy from the evil villain Galia that is endangering His Holiness, the Pope!”

Once again, the voices of the young pupils echoed.

“To stop the conspiracy!“

Except with the affair of Void, Henrietta had explained the measures that will be taken to the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit gentlemen.

“Something has targeted the Pope.”

In the next upcoming ceremony, the plan was to intimidate Galia to attack so they could be labeled as Heretics.

When that moment comes, Romalia will take all efforts to seize them.

Henceforth, the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit were doing their best to provide backup forces.

The Enemy, Galia, the one that will be labeled as Heretics, will most likely use demonic forces. (the actual literal translation would be evil tools)

That's why the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit of Tristain will be extremely careful.

Because the order came from Henrietta directly, the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit's morale rose to the culmination point. But of course the main reason they became so is because it is a good chance to restore their disgraced honour in the Magic Academy. If they successfully accomplish this mission, they could come home with triumphant looks!

However..... after the other day in Albion when battling Myoznitnirn, and having tasted the combat power of the enemy, the Knight Captain Guiche couldn't help but feel uneasy.

That Guiche, who before couldn't calm himself down, continued to give instructions while gazing at the sky.

The knight gentlemen created a simulation of the actual battle by using big golems as sparring partners. Any line class mage can make earth golems of this size. These sparring partners were used to land magic attacks.

“Come to think of it, are you well Saito?“

Guiche with a worried voice asked Saito who was standing beside him.

Ahead, the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit who were using a big golem as an enemy model, launched magic attacks. Some hit and some missed. “Yes, I have successfully landed an attack." "No, it's mine”, that kind of commotion. The Knight Corps of the Water Spirit “Ondine” desperately tried to become as strong as possible for the next upcoming battle. Although it is probably a futile effort, whatever magic talent they may possess.

As to be expected for a line class level golem.

Those mortals don't even have a clue what kind of magic will be used by the Galia forces..... or Myoznitnirn.

“Whatever, it is futile, probably. But the efforts those guys give to achieve results is quite admirable.“

Calmly analyzing the differences in the combat ability, Saito said that. *Truthfully, I don't want to involve them. But since it is an order from Henrietta, there is no helping it. These guys also have their pride as a part of the imperial guards forces. As for me.....*

I had withdrew the objection stances I made for the plan to retake the holy land. If by any chances Galia really makes a move..... then at all costs, the plan must succeed no matter what.

“At any rate, I will figure out something when the time comes.“

Saito said that while feeling the weight of the AK-47 and Derflinger he carried on his shoulder, as part of his protecting duty, Saito and his fellows were permitted to use any special weapon in the temple warehouses.

It's better if I could have some of these weapons, and so Saito chose the Russian-made Ak-47. This guy has the most destruction power, Derflinger told him so from the instinct he perceived.

“I too have to do the best of my ability..... that gigantic marionette knight from that elf. Perhaps this time, if I manage to live, I can find a way home.”

As for Guiche, he continued gazing at the sky.

When it was the time for lunch break, the gentlemen of the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit were full of sweat, and tiredly walked to the dining room. In a seat inside was Louise, who waited for Saito and fellows. When she saw the figure of Saito in the middle, suddenly her cheeks showed signs of being displeased.

With that angry mood, she took a seat besides Saito.

“Still in a bad temper?”

Of course I am, Louise thought.

The one who will confront the enemy directly is not Henrietta or the Pope, she

understands that fully. Even though the person that bears the most dangerous task is him. *Could you show just a little sign of dissatisfaction?*

I understand, we have to settle the score with Galia's Void user. But.....

Right now, I can't give much contribution. Since I am still recovering my will-power.

With a strong tone, Louise said.

“Hey.”

“Huh?”

“Try to value yourself a little bit!”

Saito laughed when Louise said that.

“What's with you, is it strange?”

“That's not it..... I think it's reversed.”

“Eh?”

“See, you acted as a discarded chess piece in the Albion incident once before.....”

When Louise remembered, her cheeks blushed. Then with a strong appearance, glared back at Saito.

“You follow me!”

Louise who was stretching Saito's ear, stood.

“Ouch! What's with you?!”

Leaving the dining room, she pulled Saito to the corner of the corridor, and with a strong tune yelled.

“You know! The degree of dangerousness is different from that time! Perhaps even more dangerous. Understand, the enemy this time is an insane Void user.....

Even if the three Void users on our side joined forces! Certainly, he will still come. Until now, they have continued attacking, so this time they will surely come!” (not very sure with translation in last sentences)

“Hey, you know, you've changed.”

“What?”

“The you in the past, whatever the princess ordered, you would obey.”

“Hey, listen seriously!”

“Aye aye!”

“...You are conceited. I'm sure looking from past experience, you are thinking it will be alright. What a crude way of thinking. Not only you, that goes for the Princess and the Pope..... You can't help but think that. Don't mess with me! Eee, Certainly it's you who stopped the 70,000 soldiers of Albion and defeated that elf. But.... that was done with tough luck. One wrong step and we would be a corpse.”

“I know that a hundred times better than you. The one who did the fighting was me, so I understand it well.

“Then why did you promise to help without thinking!? I'll say it again, it's you who charges the enemy directly. Whether it's Henrietta or the Pope, they are not the true fighting potential, isn't it!? Julio is not weak. But after all, that person's combat abilities is Vindálfr Command Beast..... When the fight really begins, in the end, his familiar will do the fighting!”

With a depressed voice, Louise says.

“.....Do you really understand that? When the fighting begins, certainly the one who charges to the front is you, Gandálfr [Shield of God] they called it. But..... in the end, you are just a single human. Be it the Princess or the Pope, they cannot act like a shield.”

Saito mimicked looking troubled. While gazing far away, says.

“I..... until now..... when I was living in that world, never thought for whom I

will live for, not even once. But when I came to this world. I am not the past me. Yes, I think it's something like that.”

“What are you mumbling?”

“Let's say, living for one's own self, thinking for the best of my own convenience. Living by ignoring everything else,that would only result in regret, understood? If we see thoroughly, this world does not differ too much with that world in this manner, even though in that place there is no magic. Somehow, it's something like that, that's why I thought it was okay to do my best.”

Saito!”

“Right. Until now I was always thinking for whom am I living for? I always couldn't understand that. But when I came here.....”

Saito fixed his gaze at Louise.

“I more or less pretty much understand that; for who am I living for, so I won't run away. But when I was alone facing danger, I think I would run. Perhaps that's a foolish act. What could be gained in fighting? But, that's not it. When the person I like is endangered, I will fight.”

Louise's cheeks blushed.

But..... I can't lose here.

“I want to always be together with you.”

That's how a boy would be thinking; they didn't want to lose in an unimportant fight. Those words he said should be some kind of persuasion, but he can't find the right words.

“Saito....” when she rose her face, from behind there was a call.

“Louise.”

Agnes was there when she turned around, looking at Louise.

“You are called by her Majesty. Bring the Founder's prayer book, please come as

soon as possible!”

Louise's face stiffened, still continuing to glare at Saito.

“Please wait for a little bit. I haven't finished talking yet!”

Mentioning that, Agnes walked away.

Meanwhile, Saito had left wanting to go back to the Cafeteria. Ah, if I may say a word, I don't want to meet with those eyes. That was my true intention.

Afternoon came with the same menu of training, aimlessly wondering, impatiently running until the sound of panting could be heard, it was Colbert.

“Yo, sensei, something wrong?”

“It works! It works!”

“What works?”

Colbert looked excited.

“Notebook (hiragana) computer is working!”

“What did you say?”

Saito replied with a high pitched voice.

Since have been prepared in Colbert room before, in front of Saito was a round looking object, a huge black battery.

“How could this thing.....”

Could it be yesterday that Julio brought the weapon from that warehouse to here? But Colbert shouldn't have known that yet. But soon after, his doubt vanished.

“This thing here..... is from dragon raiment, that aircraft you called, wasn't it?”

Colbert said that, with an expressionless face.

“This is?”

Saito found it hard to believe what was in front of him. Now that I think about it, after inspecting more carefully, that thing may be similar to present days battery, only bigger and far older.

It roughly resembled the batteries that are used in present-day cars and motorcycles. Inspecting more carefully, there is the logo 'Mitsubishi Battery model 3 stepping 2, June Showa years 18.'

This is part of the zero fighter, it couldn't be wrong.

“Is by any chance..... This battery was used.”

But Colbert shook his head

“No..... it is not like that. Listen, you once said, the notebook (hiragana) is moved by electricity, but right now the power has been depleted, so it won't work, true?”

“Yes.”

“Now the source of electricity from the notebook (hiragana) should be this, true?”

Colbert took out a battery from the notebook.

“Yes. That has been depleted.... it doesn't mean it can't be charged. But there is no consent it can connect to anything in this world.”

“I always thought about this. What could we do to provide electricity to your notebook (katakana) battery.”

Colbert talked excitedly, showing a similar attitude to that of any scientist who had successfully reached a conclusion after a series of experiments and want to publish it to the world; seemingly in a trance.

“First of all, note what electricity was used by that aircraft! It is a speedometer tool, navigation tools, and that engine which was rotating by oil to create power. And the one that provided all of that electricity is this box in the center. “I see!”

Saito looking excited too, made a fist.

“Then in this aircraft, this box is precisely the device that was providing electricity! If that thing were to rotate continuously, electricity would be made and if we connect it to this box, the aircraft's life will be renewed.

“Then... the zero fighter dynamo is used to connect with this! Magnificent!”

“No, that is impossible.”

Colbert quickly shook his head.

“Why?”

“How should I say it, it's the same electricity. But the electricity needed to move this notebook (hiragana) and the one that is used for moving that aircraft is different. A more complicated electricity type is needed. If we forced it to connect with that electric box, it could break.”

“.....Ah, then what should we do?”

Colbert's smile resurfaced.

“Use magic.”

“Magic?”

“The fundamental task is to gather the electricity in this box. To create electricity, what is the gradient? When I noticed that, I studied the mechanism on how that aircraft battery works. Doing a comparison, what is the factor that created the electricity and what is not? By investigating the components, at last.... I reached a conclusion to put it into practical use.”

“So, you mean.....”

“Right! Artificial gold! If I provide artificial gold, the depleted electricity in this device can be filled again.”

“Sensei! That's wonderful!”

Being moved, Saito hugged Colbert.

“Ahaha! Then, Saito-kun!”

“Yes?”

“If we can provide the electricity, shouldn't the notebook work?”

Meanwhile, having arrived at his Holiness', the Pope's room, Louise knocked on the door.

“Enter”, the pope answered. The door opened. Sitting in the chairs were the Pope, Julio, and Henrietta.

In the corner of the room, Tiffania stood timidly.

“At last.... we have been waiting.”

Vittorio stood and welcomed Louise. On his finger, there is a ring that reflected the light. Louise continuously starred at that ring.

Vittorio fondly brushed the ring in his finger.

“The other day... Only one, the fourth ring, has been returned to my finger.”

“Then your need with me is.....”

“Could you hand me the founder prayer's book, please?”

Louise took a glance at Henrietta. Henrietta gave a big nod.

“The power of the Founder's prayer book is to discover a new spell. By using the national treasure of Romalia, the “Fire Ruby”, it is possible to get a new spell.

“What kind of spell?”

Louise asked. Could it be really helpful this time for the incoming battle?

“It's not a spell for battles. Are you familiar with “Observe” magic?”

“Yes.”

Wind elemental magic, distant viewing type, able to see far away. In mister Ostmand's room, there is an “observing mirror”, which is a magic tool.

“Observation is a really handy spell, but it will not help the fight directly.”

“My spell type is similar to that. However, the vision shown is different..... It's not Halkeginia's scenery”.

Louise felt a little disappointed. It's not able to watch the enemy movement in detail, if it can't do at least that, it is useless.

Noticing the disappointed face on Louise, Vittorio continued to persuade.

“Each element of Void has its own uniqueness. It's not part of the four element system..... However, it's diverged among us. It seems my basic type is a movement element. Either my familiar or the spells I use are like that. Yours is offensive.”

“Then how about Tiffania? Or the Gallia void user?”

“At this time, we are yet to know. But it's related to divination. That's what we want to find out right now. Then your Majesty, Queen Henrietta.....”

Henrietta nodded, and took a ring.

It's the Wind Ruby.

Various unfortunate fates befall on this ring. From Albion's royal family Wales, to Saito, to Henrietta..... The wind treasure has changed owner a few times. Henrietta walked to the corner of the room, making for Tiffania.

“Y, your majesty?'

“Please receive this.”

“Bu, but.....”

Tiffania's face reddened, ashamed. Henrietta took Tiffania's hand.

“This ring has always been passed down from Albion's royal family..... Except you. Right now, there is no one else that has that bloodline. This has been destined to be placed on your finger. Rise, are thou not a Void user?"

With that said, Tiffania received the Wind Ruby, carefully inserting it on her finger. Tiffania's white, beautiful skin matched perfectly with the wind ring.

Now, Vittorio said, facing Louise's direction.

"Brimir's secret is just like the treasures that were packed in a casket. Each treasure (magic) is different. And the rings..... are the key to opening that casket. I wonder what kind of treasure that will be shown by Miss Tiffania. Miss Tiffania, please open the Founder's prayer book."

Louise remembered the words she once said to Tiffania.

“What I need to do is just read.”

So, does it apply to another Void user too? Louise's heart wondered, and Vittorio answered.

“The treasures did not choose four Void users. Such is the reason, however, we are brothers.”

Hereupon, What kind of spell will be discovered by Tiffania?

Once before, I have discovered a new spell.....

Louise handed over the Founder's prayer book to Tiffania. Biting her lips, Tiffania received it.

Taking a deep breath for gathering courage, her big breasts moved up and down. And then with a determined look, Tiffania opened her eyes. Resolute to face any destiny that may lie.

Slowly, Tiffania opened a page.

One page, one page, Tiffania continued to turn pages.

“Is there any inscriptions that you can see?”

Tiffania shook her head.

“No.... nothing.”

“Seems like it's not your time yet.”

Tiffania leaked a sigh, a sign of relief.

“Then, it's my turn now.”

Vittorio received the Founder's prayer book from Tiffania, with a similar hesitation to see, and opened it.

However..... this time a page in the Founder's prayer book started radiating bright light.

Vittorio was illuminated by that dazzling light, the dignity of the fifth saint was shaken. Meanwhile, Julio, with the same ever modest look, crumbled to the floor.

“Your Holiness..... oh, your Holiness.....”

Henrietta, was amazed at that shining light.

Louise too, couldn't say anything, continued watching that scene.

That moment witnessed the other users gain Void.

The second Void user, Pope Vittorio.

Inside the light, Vittorio read the characters that appeared.

“Upper center in the middle page. World Door”.

Saito plugged in the source of electricity. With the sound “Beep”, the notebook start to operate.

Characters began to appear on the LCD screen, Colbert held his breath.

“What a fine, beautiful display.”

“Now, we are still in the process of booting.”

For Saito, it has been one year since he last saw this screen naturally; his pulse beat fast. The OS logo was shown..... and the Desktop screen appeared.

“It's fortunate. This machine is not broken.”

Like a child, Colbert watched intently at that bright screen.

“Then, Saito-kun.”

“Yes?”

“What kind of thing can this device do?”

Saito looked troubled. That will be a difficult explanation.

“For example, internet....”

“That was what you said before, many many thing can be found to gather information, the functionality of this thing, right?”

“Affirmative.”

“With all honour, could you demonstrate it for me?”

“I'd love to, but I think there is no connection.”

Saito said. This is a different world, it's impossible to connect.

“Whatever, for the sake of truth, let's try it?”

Nodding, he understood. Saito opened an application to test the connection.

Meanwhile in the Pope's office, the sound of the spells being chanted vibrated in the room.

Yuru.eru.nawashizu.pooba.shirumari.....

Louise was gazing intently at the performance.

The name of the spell that was chanted, spinning her head trying to remember.

“World Door."

That is..... that is, by any chance? Could it be.....?

Hagasu.eoruu.peoosu.....

The Pope finished reciting the spell. The power of Void like always took some time to finish chanting, moreover, it exhausts will power.

And then..... swinging the staff so it pointed to the air.

The first time that was shown..... something that resembled a small dot, a speck.

Like a sparkling light of a crystal, floating in the sky..... that kind of scene.

Gradually, that tiny thing turned bigger and bigger until it reached the size of a hand mirror.

“Mirror....“

There is a vision in that mirror..... No, it couldn't be a mirror. The vision that is being projected is not a vision that I have ever seen. Tall, rows of tower..... a vision of a different country.

“This is.....“

Louise muttered.

Not a scene of Halkeginia.

Could it be..... this is.....

The name of the spell is resurrected.

“World Door.“

“This vision..... could it be.....“ Vittorio satisfied, returned a nod.

“Right. A world different from ours. The world where flying machines are made..... the place before us gives a sense of extraordinary technology, the home-world.” “That is..... Saito's birthplace.“

Louise continued to stare at Saito's home-world. Those tall looking towers..... many towers forming rows is a city, Louise has never seen scenery like this.

No, it is not an ordinary tower; those high uniformity, from looking at those, there is no similar tower like this in any of Halkeginia's castles. That highly refined art of the walls..... many of them are made from glass that seemed to sparkle, reflecting the sun light. Even with magic, it is impossible to archive this, truly an art.

I wonder how many of them stand there.

Tiffania too, her eyes wide-open, continued gazing at that vision. Henrietta too, looked at that vision with anxiety. As for Julio, he showed signs of satisfaction just by watching these ladies.

Vittorio continued to say:

“The spell I used right now only reflects The World, not even past this point. Nevertheless, the true strength of The World Door spell is different. If that spell is really used, the gate to that world can really be opened.“

After the demonstration had been shown..... the sphere of reflection vanished. That spell only lasted for 10 seconds..... But even with that, surely it was a most exhausting will power. At any rate, the gate to a different world can really be opened.....

Louise ran.

“Hey Louise, where are you going?“

That figure, Julio said that.

“It's been decided, hasn't it? To tell Saito about this! A way to go home has been found!“

“Oi, oi!, if you do that, I would be troubled.“ With a smile on his face, Julio said that.

“What do you mean?“

“I, Look at the fact that he came from that world. He once said before, 'in the holy land, there is a possibility that I may find a way home'. If you told him this magic, the only reason that he would come would be moot, wouldn't it?“

“How could you!?“

“That is not the only problem.“ Vittorio interrupted.

“This World Door, quite a spell that requires exhausting will power. For the sake of showing this to you, a small door was made..... If we want to make a bigger door, for example: sufficient enough for him to enter, I'm afraid that would take all of my will power. My Void ability, if it was not for Halkegenia's sake, I can't use it; I have to preserve this power. For the sake for him to go back home, if only for that reason, I can't use this spell.“

“But! But!“

Louise was drawing near to Vittorio. Julio, who widened both his hands, said.

“Besides that Louise, can you really bear it if he really goes back home?“

"....Eh?“

“Wouldn't you be troubled too? If you said to him to go home....“

Louise took a blow.

“Louise, you don't want to part with him, right?“

Louise began to shiver. Seems now Louise began to grasp the situation.

About myself..... that didn't want to part with Saito. That time, when I thought he was dead..... What did I do actually? I attempted suicide by jumping from the

fire tower, wasn't it?

Do I dare to take the choice to part with him forever?.

I don't want the second time that I can't meet him.

Can I bear a situation like that?

Now I remember, I didn't think seriously about this matter.

How many times have I said to him that I will find a way home for you. Actually, I haven't thought deep about the meaning of those words.

In reality, if Saito could really find a way to home..... I'm trembling right now.

The chance of Saito having a girl, that thought really scared me!

To the pale looking Louise, Vittorio continued.

“In the long lifespan of a human, we will endlessly make choices. Miss Valliere, living for the sake of love is right. Wishing for his happiness is right too..... I don't think it is a shame to choose any of them. Perhaps I will too, choose for my sake. In the religious teachings, consideration to one of the party is not a wrong thing. That's what I think.“ Henrietta too, says to Louise with a painful voice.

“Louise, in choosing the option, we took the meaning the other options we discarded. No matter what it takes, Saito-dono can't go home. Moreover, wisely thinking, he has not come to this world just to inspect it. But... Even if it's for the sake of your love, his parents will be abandoned. In the end, he returns for justice, I think. “He can't go back home”, it's not a shame if this cruel conscience is ignored.”

Henrietta continued talking.

“Listen carefully, no matter how many times you have been saved, do not think only for yourself. Think for the sake of the future of Halkeginia. For our ideals, his strength is needed..... Please think carefully and make your judgment wisely, Louise.“

“Saito-kun.....“

Dumbfounded, Colbert dazed at Saito, asked.

However, there was no reply.

Saito's vision was stuck on the notebook computer.

There.... A sign on the browser telling him it's connected to the internet.

It's connected.

How could it be?

I don't think it could be connected.

Saito's fingers were moving the cursor from the taskbar.

Entered the web-mail address, and then clicked.

In just a few seconds, one by one, mail flowed continuously.

It was direct mail. Some from his friends.

But, the most frequent was from..... his mother.

It couldn't be counted how many there was actually.

Once a day, it could delivered two or three times.

He opened the latest mail.

To, Saito.

It's been a year since you have been gone. Right now, where could you be?

We have been asking many people to find you, but still you can't be found.

I am hoping, somehow this mail can reach you, so the fee always payed.

Today, I made your favorite, hamburger. Like when cutting an onion, tears flowed.

"Are you well?

I'm so worried just thinking that. I can't think anything besides that.

Whatever you do, I couldn't care.

But please show your face."

Saito opened the next mails one by one.

There is not much change on the display screen.

Most of the mails' topics were worrying about Saito's disappearance.

Eventually, the link got cut off.

Saito was just dumbstruck opening this large quantity of mail.

- Drip*, tears dropped to the display screen.

“Saito-kun, that is.....“

“It's mail."

“Mail?“

“A letter. From my mother.“

Colbert held his breath. Without waiting for the next words, Colbert exited the room.

Rushing out from his Holiness, Pope's room, Louise ran. *I want to meet Saito.*

In the end, Louise submitted to their will.

After that long conversation, in the end, a conclusion has been reached.

However..... wasn't the actual circumstances of the choices mostly related to myself?

For the sake of the world, they said... but in the end, didn't it turn out for my sake?

Because I want to be embraced.

Because the existence of myself is miserable, I want him to accept me.

When she returned to the dining room, Saito's figure couldn't be found anywhere. Hearing from his fellows in the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit, he has gone to Colbert-sensei's room.

In the direction of Colbert room. In front of the door, there was Colbert, who crossed his arms. Louise approached him, inquiring Colbert.

“Sensei, Saito.....“

Having been asked, without saying anything, he pointed to something.

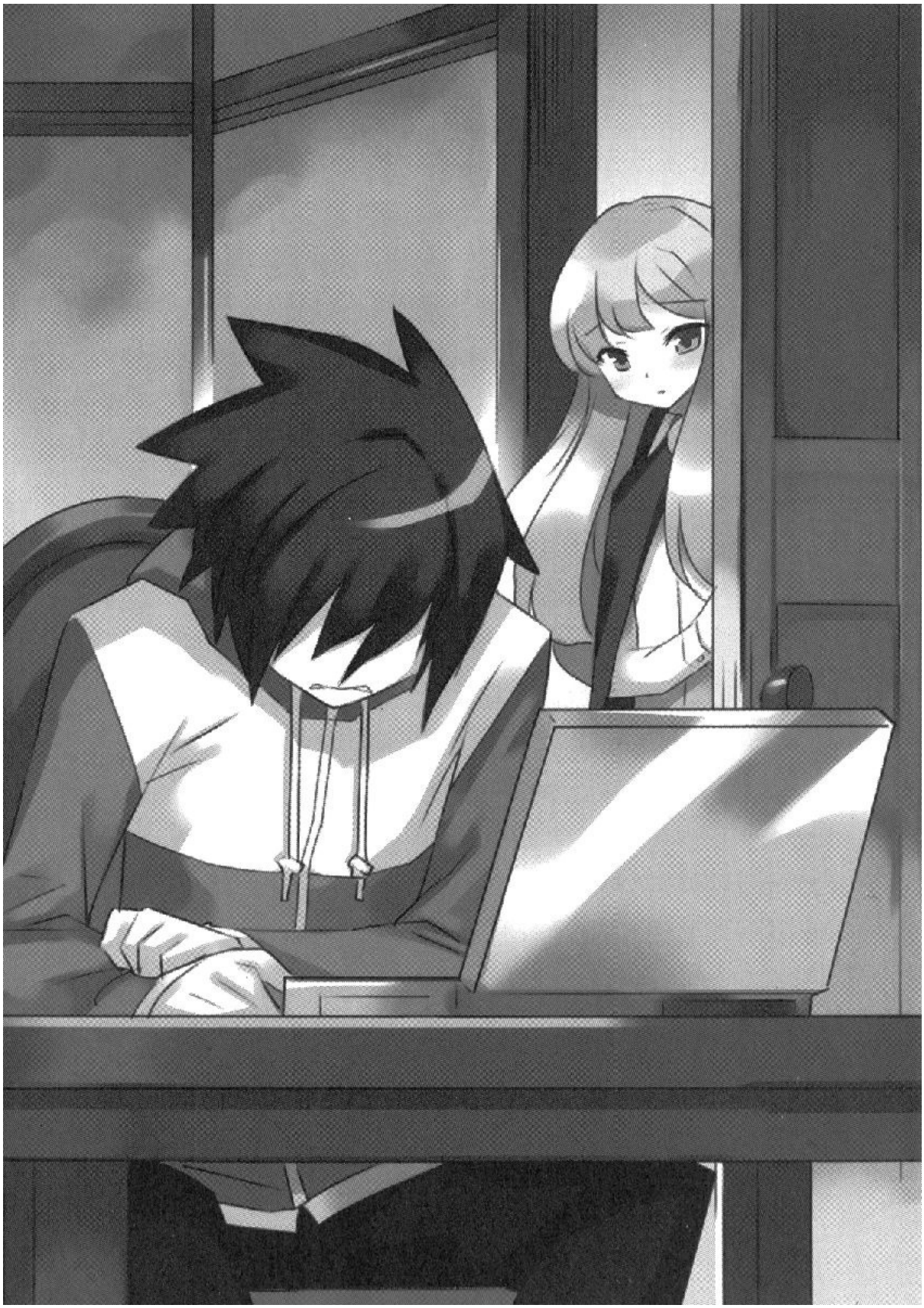
And then, in the vision visible from the door gap... there was a silent figure in the center.

“.....Saito?“

Saito's body was frozen in front of the desk. In the surface of the desk there was something. Louise remembered that strange looking machine. When Saito came to this world for the first time, he showed that thing to her.

Saito's shoulders were shivering.

He's crying.



“Sensei, what happened, really.....?“

With a small voice, looking troubled, Colbert explained.

“You see that device..... that Saito brought from his world..... somehow, letters can be delivered.”

".....Letters?“

That machine seems like one way or another it could do that.

“.....From whom was the letter sent?“

“It seems from his mother. Seems a sensitive topic.“

Louise receiving a heavy blow to her head, was shocked.

Didn't Saito say before...

That he didn't have any family?

“But....“

But immediately, Louise noticed.

Saito was lying.

Saying he didn't have a family was a lie too.

Why?

I know.

To not burden me with responsibility.

Dumbfounded, Louise stood blankly.

Then, Louise's tears start to flow in her eyes.

Saito, even lying to the extent of hurting himself..... but right now, what did I do to him?

Even without it being said, I want to be cured from this guilty feeling by being held by Saito.

“I..... why I was such a coward like this.“

A silent cursing voice, whispered by her.

“Miss Valliere?“

Bewildered, Colbert's voice asked. But his voice didn't reach Louise. He remembered what Saito once said.

“I more or less understand, for whom I live right now.“

That's why, Saito lied..... Because he was thinking of the most important thing. *Despite of this, did I myself think for him too? The best for his sake.*

Even right now, I want to be comforted by him. That's why I came here..... Louise ran.

“Ah, wait, Miss Valliere!“

Colbert called, trying to stop her, but without turning back, Louise continued leaving.

Rushing over to her own room, lying down on the bed.

Gazing at the ceiling, thinking.

“I..... what is it, that I should do?“

Then I too, will do my best to think of something, for the sake of this boy. What is it that I can do for him?

And then, Louise continued thinking.....

Chapter 8: The Meaning of the Smile

Saito woke up in Mister Colbert’s room. Lying down on the table, he was covered by a blanket. It seemed that the one who put the blanket on him was Mister Colbert, who was asleep in his bed.

It seemed that Saito had inadvertently fallen asleep. Rays of morning light shone through the window.

Now I remember. I was so tired from crying yesterday that I fell asleep.

While thinking that, Saito stared at the display of his notebook computer. It seemed like the power supply had been taken off.

I was thinking about asking Mister Colbert to reconnect my notebook to the battery, but decided against it.

I memorized it last time, so I am able to recall it... so it is not necessary to do it again.

From the window, he gazed up at the sky.

Somehow, this world was connected to Earth, one way or another.

What could it be that connected these two worlds together?

Considering how tanks and aircraft could come to this world, it should also be normal for electromagnetic waves to enter.

Ah, that seems to be the case. Saito looked around absent-mindedly as he thought.

After all, I was a weak man.

I have comrades, so I think that I can accomplish something, since that's what I can accept while living in this world. Nevertheless, when I read the mail, I was suddenly overcome by the feeling of homesickness.

To put it plainly, I am a weak man.

It can't be helped since I suddenly read the mail. Thinking this, Saito left his notebook computer behind in Mister Colbert’s room.

Saito felt depressed. While he trudged through the corridor he muttered:

"Tomorrow will be a troublesome day. The three-year anniversary of the Pope's coronation... My spirit must not be like this."

At any rate, my mood must be kept hidden from Louise.

I don't want her to get depressed again.

I should be thinking about more immediate concerns. Saito positively thought.

Okay, Let's hide this depressed face of mine. While forcefully doing that, Saito opened the door to the living room.

"Louise, forgive me for not coming back yesterday. I was drinking with Mr. Colbert in his room and collapsed..."

Louise was sitting in the chair looking at the mirror. But it seemed that she wasn't going to scold Saito. Instead she smiled back, almost as if a it were a trap.

"Good morning."

Louise’s sudden smile surprised him.

"What the...? What's with your clothes..."

"Eh, this? I went out to buy this last evening."

Louise wasn’t in her usual Tristain Academy uniform, but a cute blouse with a short, deep blue silk skirt and a red ribbon which trailed from the collar.

"Why?"

Saito asked, amazed. *Of all days, why today?* No, even if this is a joke in Romalia's great cathedral, Saito still couldn't understand the reason.

"Oh I understand, it's for tomorrow’s ceremony isn't it? But is it okay to be wearing that?"

Then Louise smiled pleasantly and said.

"No, it's for going to town to shop with you today."

"Me, why?"

"In the town, there is a festival for the celebration of His Holiness the Pope’s third anniversary. In noble society there are festivals; here on the streets it seems like they have festivals too. Now, I want to go to the festival with you."

"But tomorrow... shouldn't we be using the time we have today to prepare ourselves?"

"No, it's okay. Practicing right now would not change the result. It would be a pointless effort. Besides, sometimes relaxation is important too."

Looking innocent, Louise grabbed Saito’s arm.

"Okay, let's go?"

In the end, attracted by Louise’s unusually cute behavior, Saito went to town. Louise was glued to Saito’s arm. *What, was something wrong?* He turned for a moment toward Louise. Louise only smiled back.

As expected, I have a bad feeling about this.

"Hey Louise?" Saito asked.

"Yes."

"What are you scheming?"

But Louise was laughing. Kyahaha.

Kyahaha? Louise laughing? Saito's head was full of questions, but Louise remained glued to Saito arm.

"I'm not scheming anything."

"Lie!"

"It's not a lie. Honestly, for today I just want to take a stroll with you through town. That's all."

Looking at it from all sides her smile was not a scheming one. *Still, there is something hidden*, Saito thought. Then Louise pointed at something.

"Eh, that's right, for today I will listen to anything you request."

"Huh?"

"Really, I'm serious. So don't be reserved, okay?"

Smiling and leaning to him. Saito felt more and more suspicious. For the sake of testing, he said.

"Then, show me your underwear."

He thought he was going to be kicked, so he prepared for that.

But, neither kick, punch, nor magic attack was launched. Instead, Louise shyly began to slowly lift up her skirt.

"Okay."

It's been a while since I last saw Louise's underwear, he thought.

She didn't seem to be angry.

Meaning...? “Hey, this is the middle of the street, there are a lot of people here.” Saito said while furiously trying to stop her.

"Stop, people can see you!"

With a smile, Louise returned the skirt to its original position.

Too suspicious.

Is this really the real Louise?

Could it be that someone transformed into her?

Right, Myoznitnirn’s magical tool, for instance...

That was an act, Saito thought. The tension began to build with his next words.

"Ah, then, let me touch your breasts."

"Go ahead."

Louise nodded almost instantly, with a smiling face.

"Okay, I won't hold back then."

Gulp, Saito swallowed his saliva and began to touch her small breast. Mofu, mofu.

Even with her small breasts, touching her there, Saito’s excitment began to rise.

When he looked back at her, she was still smiling brightly. A face with a color of happiness. Prepared for death, Saito started to shake. If this is the real Louise, let's try that. He thought.

"And... you call this a breast?"

"Yes."

she positively nodded with a smile.

This was absolutely not Louise!

"Wahaha! I suggest that you gather Tiffania's sweat and make it into a potion?"

"No need, I'm fine with what I have."

Saito jumped back that instance, taking a stance.

"Who or what are you!"

"Just like I keep saying, I am me. Please believe me."

"Why aren't you angry?"

"Because, I..."

She hesitantly said those words, and when she figured out something, she raised her face.

"Yes! You see, tomorrow there’s going to be a fierce battle. The enemy seems to be Myoznitnirn, right? So this is some kind of reward! you see?!"

Louise said that in what seemed to be a joyful manner.

You would normally, even in a situation such as this, object.

In the end, Louise seemed to have changed her way of thinking. Perhaps it was the noble pride within her. Saito reached understanding. Louise spoke again.

"You want to touch more?"

"..."

"It’s alright! Go ahead! Touch them! Please!"

"..."

"Please?"

For the ninth time, she smiled. 'Oh well, if she is enjoying this then I should too.' Saito thought. This leisurely situation is not a reckless action. Besides, there is the possibility that one of us may be lost tomorrow. Anyhow, however bad the situation turns out to be we will survive.

Tomorrow is the commemoration of the Pope’s coronation and things are busy in this Romalian street. Of course, it shouldn't differ too much from the festivals usually held in Tristania.

As expected of the street stalls and the performances, the atmosphere here felt busy. Even in Romalia, in every place around here, pilgrims could be seen crowding merchants. The various goods brought by them were put in the front of the stalls.

Louise stood in front of clothes shelves that were displayed in the front of a stall, doing her best to search for something.

"What, do you really want a scarf that much?, I will buy it for you, so go ahead to choose something better."

Even with that said, Louise only shook her head. And then determined to choose a plain scarf, she requested this one.

"...Hey Louise, what do you plan to do with a scarf of that color?"

The scarf’s color didn’t fit with women's tastes. A black one, with lattice pattern embroidery. But Louise just answered by shaking her head.

"See this black color, it suits you."

"What, did you buy that for me?"

Louise nodded and smiled sweetly.

"Could it be that you somehow accidentally drank a love potion again?"

"That's not it. Like I said, its a reward."

"I see, so this is a reward too," Saito murmured.

For the time being for today I will accompany Louise, Saito thought.

Saito and Louise loitered around the street. Around noon, priests went out too to drink and sing war songs with their comrades-in-arms.

The impression that I had, when first entering this place, though it's quite strict, it is still not too different with other towns in Halkeginia. In the middle was a dance party provided by a band using a flute and drum to perform.

Louise pulled Saito and brought him to the center.

"Let's dance."

With cheerful rhythm accompanying them, Louise and Saito danced. A pleasant waltz. Louise was dancing, and Saito was trying to follow her lead.

After they were satisfied they went to the tavern that they had been chased into by the Templar knights.

When they entered the tavern, they saw that the table had been replaced by high class looking sparkling one. It seemed that the money Kirche had given as compensation was quite sufficient to repair all the damage. The window and stand counter had been replaced with a glass one.

This entire store became so posh it was like a different establishment altogether.

The shopkeeper too was wearing first class brand-new polished clothes. Seeing this, Louise and Saito looked at each other and laughed.

When they entered, the shopkeeper recognized Louise and Saito and looked away awkwardly.

"Sorry for the trouble last time." Saito grinned at the shopkeeper devilishly. And so, the shopkeeper, without a word, started sending plate after plate of food to their table.

And then he whispered silently to Saito's ear.

"I'll be in your care next year too."

Louise and Saito looked at each other and laughed once more.

When all the plates had arrived, Louise scooped up some thick broth with a spoon and brought it near Saito's face.

"Eh?"

"Now, aaaaaahhh--n."

With Louise started to say that, Saito still felt a little troubled. Even if this was a reward, it was still too much.

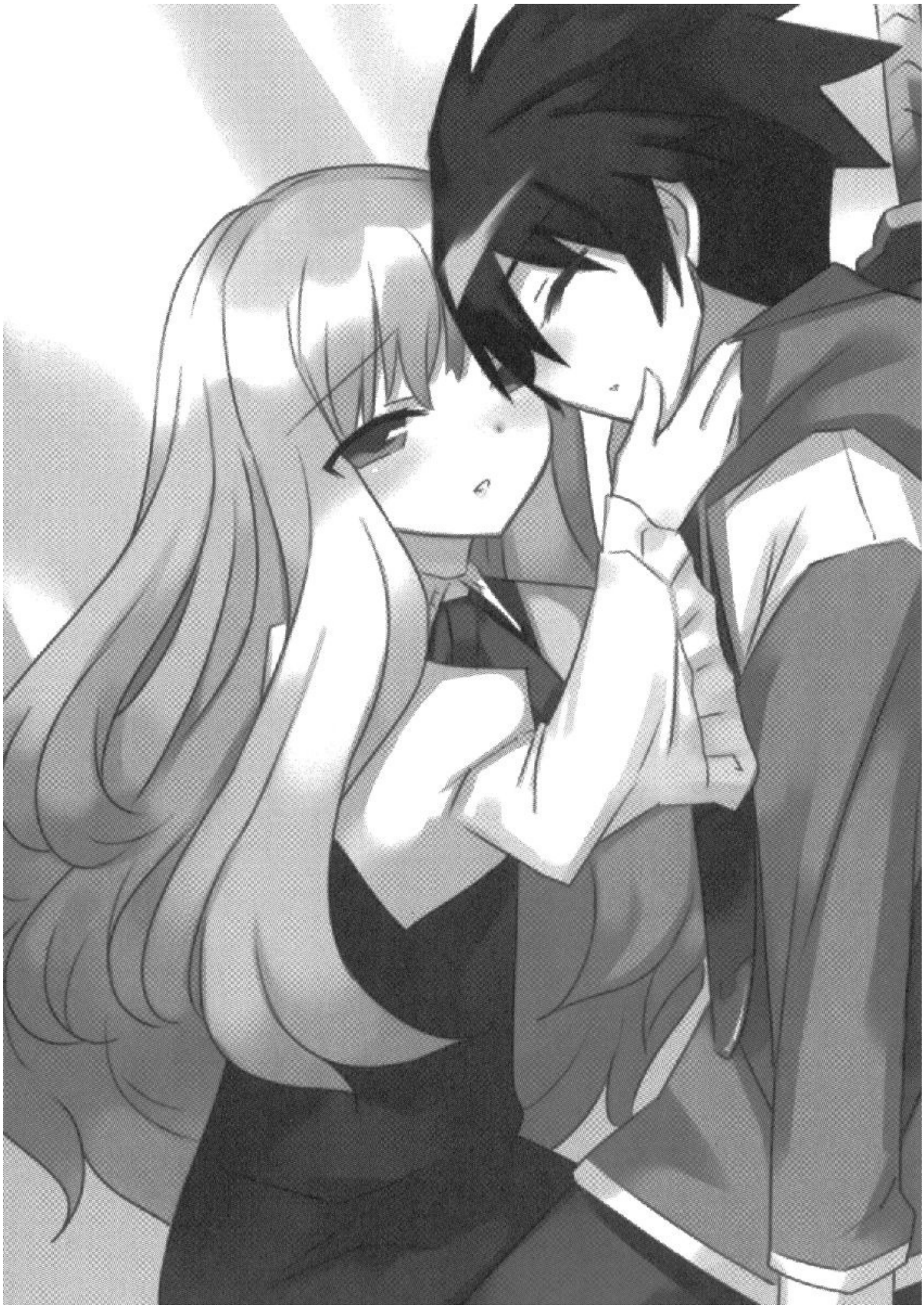
"Hey Louise, please tell me the truth. I won't get angry. Did you destroy the zero fighter by accident? So you're trying to get on my good side."

"That's not it. Today I'm cute, so I want you to see more of my cute side. Please believe me, that’s the only reason."

When he heard that, he was dumbfounded and couldn’t say anything. Looking happy, Louise just smiled.

Once again, they walked through town. Louise gazed at Saito, and lightly said, "Let's go over there."

"Hey, let's kiss," she said.



"Eh? Right here?"

Something outrageous had been said. Even her face looked shy. Is it possible she wants to do that in a place where there are less people? Looking flustered, Louise suddenly started to push Saito into the nearest alley.

After that, she fixed her gaze on Saito's face, and stood there on her tippy toes. Full of passion the two of them pressed their lips together. It was a deep kiss.

For a moment, they pressed each other’s lips together. After satisfying themselves, the two of them separated. Once again, Louise showed him an extraordinary smile.

Saito could not understand the meaning behind her smiles, but Saito too tried to smile back vaguely.

While the two of them were walking, Saito would take a peek at Louise, and when she noticed that, she would return a smile, a very lovely one. In the end, they continued walking. Saito thought, for Louise, he would do anything to protect her.

But it couldn't be helped, sometimes he would remember his mother’s face. When that happened his chest would hurt.

"Something wrong?"

"Nothing at all, really."

Every time this happened, Saito would forcefully make a smile and shake his head.

Wholeheartedly, the two of them spent their time together, and when the night drew near they returned to their room. In the end, Saito was with her the whole day. Calmly thinking, from whatever aspect, it was too suspicious.

"Here, have some water, you must be tired."

Louise poured water into a cup and gave it to Saito. After taking a breath, he drank it. Saito asked.

"Hey Louise."

"Yes"

"...You, just why did you show me your smile so assertively today?"

"Can't I?"

Once more, Louise smiled a sweet smile.

"It's very strange you know! As long as I remember, this whole year you've only smiled twice! However, today you smiled 72 times."

"So you were counting... I'm so happy, thank you."

Once again, she smiled. It was an angelic smile, a lovely smile.

"So, I've smiled my whole life's worth today."

"What?"

"Twice a year, huh. If we always stay together from now on, it will take thirty years, no, forty years I think? If it was fifty years' worth it'd be even better... At that point, you will have seen the number of times I smiled at you today."

"What are you talking about?"

"You see, I won’t smile again for the rest of my life."

Even with her smiles still surfacing, tears began to flow down Louise's face.

"Louise?"

"I won't love anyone else for the rest of my life. But you must not be like me. No matter who you end up falling in love with, you have to treat her like you do me and protect her well, over in your world..."

Tears joined into a line across Louise's face, and dripped down from her beautiful chin.

"Eh? What?"

Having said that, Saito suddenly became very drowsy.

"Strange."

It was magic. But the moment he noticed that, the magic had already taken effect.

"Louise... you... the water before..."

Losing strength, Louise hugged Saito, touched his face with her hands, and pressed her lips against his.

Strength completely left Saito’s body.

The water before, just like as Saito said, had a sleeping potion put into it beforehand.

While gently embracing Saito, Louise whispered,

"Goodbye, my gentle person... Goodbye, my chevalier(knight)."

Hick. (sounds of crying from Louise)

After embracing Saito for a while, she put Saito in the bed. After a moment, she stood up.

"...It's okay now."

A moment after that, the door behind her opened; Julio was standing there with a smile surfacing on his face.

"Are you really sure about this?"

With no expression, Louise nodded.

"Yes, for the sake of Saito too, to open the [Door world]."

"Then for that sake too, you will....."

"With all my pleasure, I will give you my cooperation. Whether to capture Myoznitnirn or to take back the Holy Land... All of it. Not only that. For the

sake of Halkeginia’s ideals, I will give my life, my Void ability and my noble status."

Julio nodded.

"It seems like a saint has been born. Then, let's go immediately. We will explain the modification to our plan for tomorrow, since he won't be here anymore."

Just a moment before she left the room, Louise turned her head once more. Endless tears still flowed on her cheeks. Wiping those tears, Louise whispered,

"Goodbye, my most important person in the world."

Epilogue

The capital of Gallia, Lutèce.

The man who was called the “Mad King” by Romalia's pope was right now in the middle of a boundless beautiful garden full of flowers, and gazing afar in all directions.

This was a flower terrace which could even be the number one in Versardier, with its ever-blooming rich flowers.

The southern rose terrace.

To Joseph, this was a flower terrace where he can have fun by himself, and where he could also comfort himself from his meaningless solitary life. This was a paradise on earth built with the greatest skills of every garden architect of this country.

On this land of around two square kilometres, there were a countless number of coloured roses.

The one that held the most attention was the blue one.

That was this year's....., after improving multiple test products, the finally finished and steady blue breed of rose.

This rose, since it had a link with the royalty's blue hair, had been surnamed “La Gallia”, which meant that it was a symbol of Gallia.

Joseph looked at the flower terrace with satisfaction. He wasn't clear about the huge amount of money he had spent on this blue rose.

“This rose garden is really way too beautiful.”

Exclaimed Mrs. Molière, who was at Joseph's side. Joseph nodded with satisfaction.

“The amount of money spent on this rose garden was already enough to run a small country.”

“This is the most beautiful kingdom in the world. The taste of Your Majesty is quite elegant.”

After that, Mrs. Molière looked at Joseph and asked with a mischievous tone.

“Why did Your Majesty need to build this rose garden?”

As Joseph's lover, Mrs. Molière expected some sweet words. She was looking forward to something like “It was for you.” or something like that. However, the king's answer wasn't like that.

Joseph lightly said.

“This is so that I can destroy it.”

Mrs. Molière pursed her lips, to show her disenchantment,

“Ah! You are joking again!”

“Joking? Ah, right. It might sound like that.”

Joseph said that awkwardly, but this made Mrs. Molière even more angry. No matter when, this king is always like that. One couldn't figure out if he was joking or saying the truth.

"I have something to ask His Majesty."

"Do not hesitate."

"Your Majesty, do you love me?"

Joseph looked without understanding what Lady Molière had said. As if to say: You asked that to me?

"Of course"

"If so, then why aren't you gentle with me?" asked Mrs. Molière, beginning to mourn.

"Is that what you feel?"

"I can't bear to love a man who treats me cruelly."

Joseph was surprised to see the tears of Mrs. Molière.

"What did you say?"

"I love him!"

"You mean you love me? Is that true? Do you love the incompetent king? Do you love me even though I am humbled at home and abroad?"

"That's why I love him."

"I only think about money and status."

His wife Molière worsened in tears. "Even if your Majesty was a civilian, a beggar, my love would not change. I love your Majesty."

"Why do you love me?" asked Joseph, a bit puzzled.

"Your Majesty, you are a lonely man, you are the king of the world's wealth, but I just want to heal your heart, please. I am a woman who wants to relieve these problems, as this is love."

Joseph took the pleasure of laughing at his wife Molière.

"You're a nice person, Wife Molière. I think you're worthy of my love."

Mrs. Molière seemed intoxicated by the words of Joseph.

Finally she got those words of love she craved.

These words made her very happy. She was very proud.

He is just a person who pretends to be the king. Often your heart and mind are contradictory.

She had always been his companion. Mrs. Molière understood what no one else could understand about him, something like the infinite darkness of the abyss. She fell in love with a king.

Mrs. Molière wanted her love to melt the ice in the heart of Joseph.

I'll be the water that fills the hole in his heart.

These words should be able to cure the rotten heart of this king. The fragrance of flowers and words of love should help.

"Your Majesty, I have something to propose. It is for the sake of our future. Your Majesty, instead of total pain in your system, it would be better to share love."

However, Joseph said nothing.

"Your Majesty?"

A second later, Mrs. Molière...

"Oh, oh Oh, your Majesty, ohhhh"

Ms. Molière was stabbed in the chest.

The strength of her body disappeared.

"Why?"

Mrs. Molière did not understand why she was stabbed. And without understanding, she gradually fell into a deep sleep from which people never awoke.

Joseph slowly withdrew the dagger from Mrs. Molière’s breast. Like cutting meat, blood started gushing.

Her beautiful eyes opened one last time to look at Joseph. Joseph had the same indifferent expression to his wife lying on the floor almost dead. Then Mrs. Molière slowly closed her eyes one last time.

Joseph did not hesitate to open an oil tank, spilling it all over the terrace of flowers. Then, he set fire to the oil.

Unblinking, he watched the rose garden on fire.

Staring into the flames....

Then a woman appeared from the fire.

Not seeming to mind being in the midst of the flames, she was wearing a black robe and her hood alone showed her crimson lips.

It was Myoznitnirn.

Myoznitnirn looked at the corpse of Mrs. Molière.

"Was it your lover?" She asked.

"I do not know, maybe yes, maybe no. Anyway, it does not matter."

"Why?"

"Why, why kill her?"

"She said she loved me and that's why I killed her own people. She must have felt much pain in her heart."

"And you, Joseph-sama, do you have pain in your heart?"

Myoznitnirn smiled as if to say, you know how to do things. But Joseph refused.

"No, it can't be solved in the same way."

Myoznitnirn, satisfied, nodded and proceeded to give her report to Joseph.

"According to the report, ten special Jormungand had been completed."

"Well..."

"There is also a message saying that you have to meet the three users of the Void in Romalia."

"Oh" Joseph laughed.

"It's the perfect opportunity. Get ready; you will command the special army."

"Yes, sir."

Myoznitnirn disappeared in the fire.

Joseph picked up from the table a sound transmitter that worked with wind magic and an iron pipe. It was a transmitter that could only be used within the same castle.

"Get me in contact with the Fleet Commander" (note: do not know if it was a spell or was an order for someone else, it’s not specified in the text)

He was immediately connected to the Fleet Admiral. Joseph, through the transmitter, ordered perfectly.

"Naval fleet in the harbour of San Marin (·) Your objective is … the Romalia Empire."

Across the transmitter, Commander Claville was afraid of the order given by Joseph.

"No need to announce the war. The cities, the streets, the towns, the people, everything must be destroyed," Joseph commented.

"War? You want to start a war? But Romalia was one of our allies against the revolutionaries of Albion."

"Ally? Is that what you think? Let me tell you something. Ah, well. What if there were other countries that are conspiring against us? Isn't it more difficult to resolve this?"

"I do not know what you're talking about, Your Majesty!"

No matter what the order was, he spoke without thinking twice. It was for this reason that he had become commander, instead of the other men who were all incompetent. But that did not matter. Simply run the fleet. The real struggle would come from Myoznitnirn’s army; they simply will be the drivers.

Joseph was annoyed with having to say the right words.

"Well, obey the order. This is a high order. If we want to stop this conspiracy, we must end Romalia soon."

On the other side of the transmission, the commander pondered the matter.

Joseph was often derided as an incompetent King, but he was not an idiot.

When he proposed something, no matter how or what, he had to fulfill his goal.

This should also be part of their whims.

This included the desire to win. Claville knew all this.

Joseph put the transmitter on the table and said, cursing.

"War is a stupid thing. I do not want war. But this is not just war. This so-called war is to consider interests. What are the benefits of attacking Romalia? Would we not be destroying our soul, to attack the country where people are race to God?"

Joseph hit the table.

"Ah ah, I'm just a man, after all. But why say that God loves all his children, if I feel nothing but pain? And ironically, he has given me strength! But just nothing in my heart! Nothing! ah ah ah ah, I'm not more a man than just empty thanks to him!"

Joseph comforted himself.

"Ah, my heart is empty, as the bladder of a rotten fish. Nothing can fill the emptiness in my heart ... Neither love, nor joy nor anger, nor sadness, and even hatred that have Charlotte for killing his father, my heart is hollow." Joseph looked into the sky. Then he watched as the guards tried to stop the Fire Flower: "Fast", "Put out the Fire", "Palace on fire"…

All cries echoed in the garden. However, Joseph did not care.

His eyes burned from the intense fire, but he stayed a moment longer, just to say nonsense.

"Well, Charlotte. To overthrow God, you must kill your brother and entire cities. Okay, Charlotte. Not everything in life is virtue and glory, there is all mourning and suffering. You can only commit a sin so great and irreparable if you want to feel a little guilty."

Joseph laughed. It was an innocent smile like an angel.

"Charlotte, I'm a man, and for that reason I can also feel the tears that pamper others."